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Icelandic Pictures



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GEYSIR.

ICELANDIC PICTURES

ICELANDIC PICTURES

Drawn with Pen and Pencil

BY

FREDERICK W. W. HOWELL, F.R.G.S.

WITH A MAP AND MANY ILLUSTRATIONS

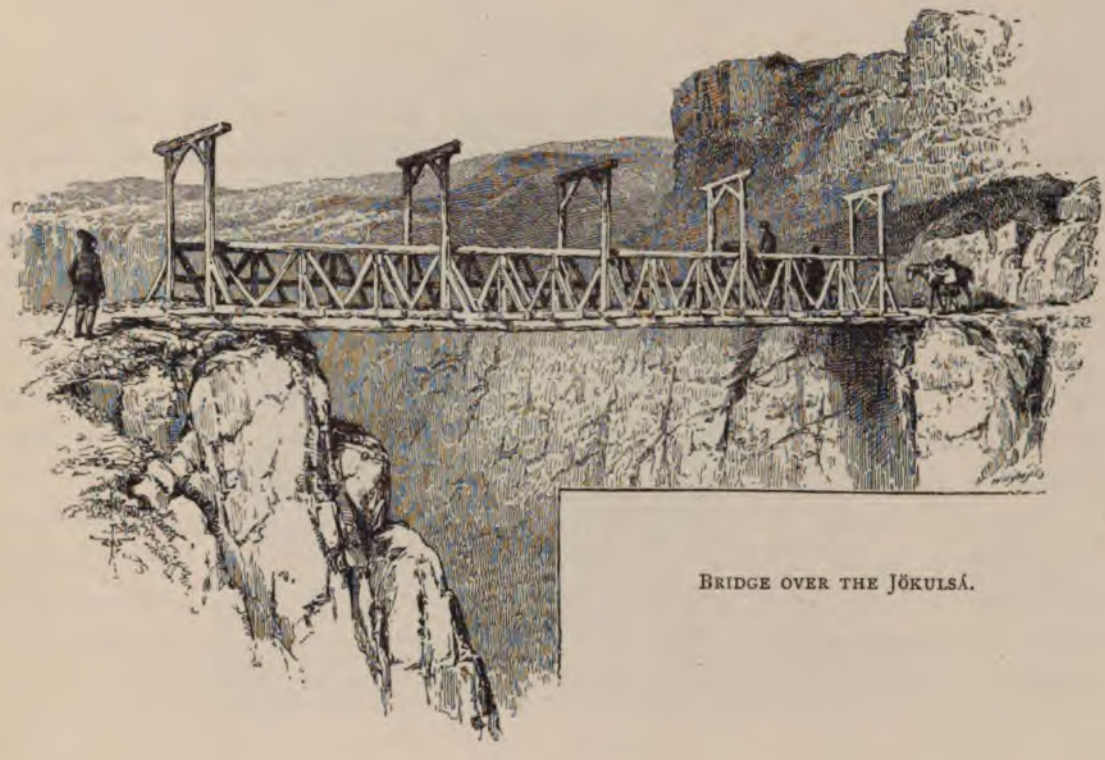
LONDON

THE RELIGIOUS TRACT SOCIETY

56 PATERNOSTER ROW AND 65 ST. PAUL'S CHURCHYARD

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BRIDGE OVER THE JÖKULSÁ.

PREFACE.

'BUT didn't you find it very cold?' is a question so often asked the writer, that he fears there are many intelligent Englishmen yet to whom Saga Land is little else than an ice-bound, ice-clad, ice-capped isle, save where Hekla's flames or Geysir's floods have pierced the crystalline crust! To such, these pages will come with special interest, revealing the wealth of historic lore and the fulness of mountain beauty possessed by Iceland. And even the snowfields themselves, in the hot bright summer days, become dazzling fairylands, while the wild-flowers at their feet can rival those of many a Switzer Alp. There are few countries in which such great changes of scenery occur within a compass so limited. From pasture to desert, from peak to sea, from ice to lava is often a transition for which an hour may suffice.

It is true that monuments of antiquity are conspicuous only by their absence; but the presence of a people with the language and many of the customs of a thousand years ago is a monument of itself. Nor is the attraction merely academical, for these people are our kinsmen, and many of us have far more ancient right to speak of Cousin Jón than Cousin Jonathan.

Twice the author has travelled through the island, in 1890 and 1891; primarily, perhaps, as a mountaineer in quest of its highest summit, virgin till 1891, but with deep and growing interest in the land itself. In addition, he has consulted five-and-twenty works of Icelandic travel, and over thirty articles in other books pertaining to the North—transactions, magazines, and other papers. It is therefore hoped that *Icelandic Pictures* will be found to contain as complete a sketch of the island as its limits permit, and that it will prove useful to many who may be led to visit a land in which travel becomes more easy every year, but which permits the wayfarer to lose himself in the atmosphere and surroundings of an old world life.

Thanks are due to so many who have freely given aid, that it becomes impossible to render them individually; but the author has been specially indebted to Mr. Magnússon of Cambridge, Mr. Sloan of Thorshavn, Dr. Olsen of Reykjavík, the Hon. S. D. Thompson of St. Louis, Rev. O. Magnússon, Rev. O. V. Gislason and Consul Paterson.

HINTS ON THE PRONUNCIATION OF ICELANDIC NAMES.

In the pronunciation of Icelandic names it should be remembered that besides a short and long there is an accented á.

á sounded like *ow* in how.			*Lax-ow.*
æ „ „ *i* „ time.		Lækr	*Līkr.*
í „ „ *ee* „ feel.		Ísland	*Eesland* (*s* not *z*).
j „ „ *i* or *y*.		Jökull	*Yuk-ull.*
ei *or* ey „ *ā* „ say.		Reykjavík	*Rake-yă-vik.*
ö „ „ *u* „ urn.		Öræfa	*Urr-i-va.*
ll „ „ *tl.*		þingvellir	*Thing-vetleer.*

And that there are two special letters—

þ, hard th.	þorun	*Thorun.*
ð, soft th.	Heiði	*Hayth-ĕ.*

(In the text of this volume no use has been made of these letters. They are always represented by their English equivalent, th.)

The accent always comes on the first syllable.



ORDINARY ICELANDIC COSTUMES (WOMEN).

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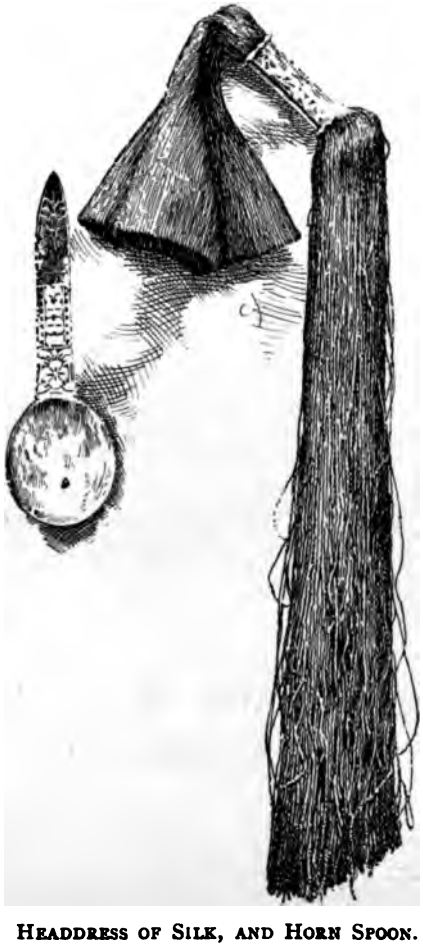
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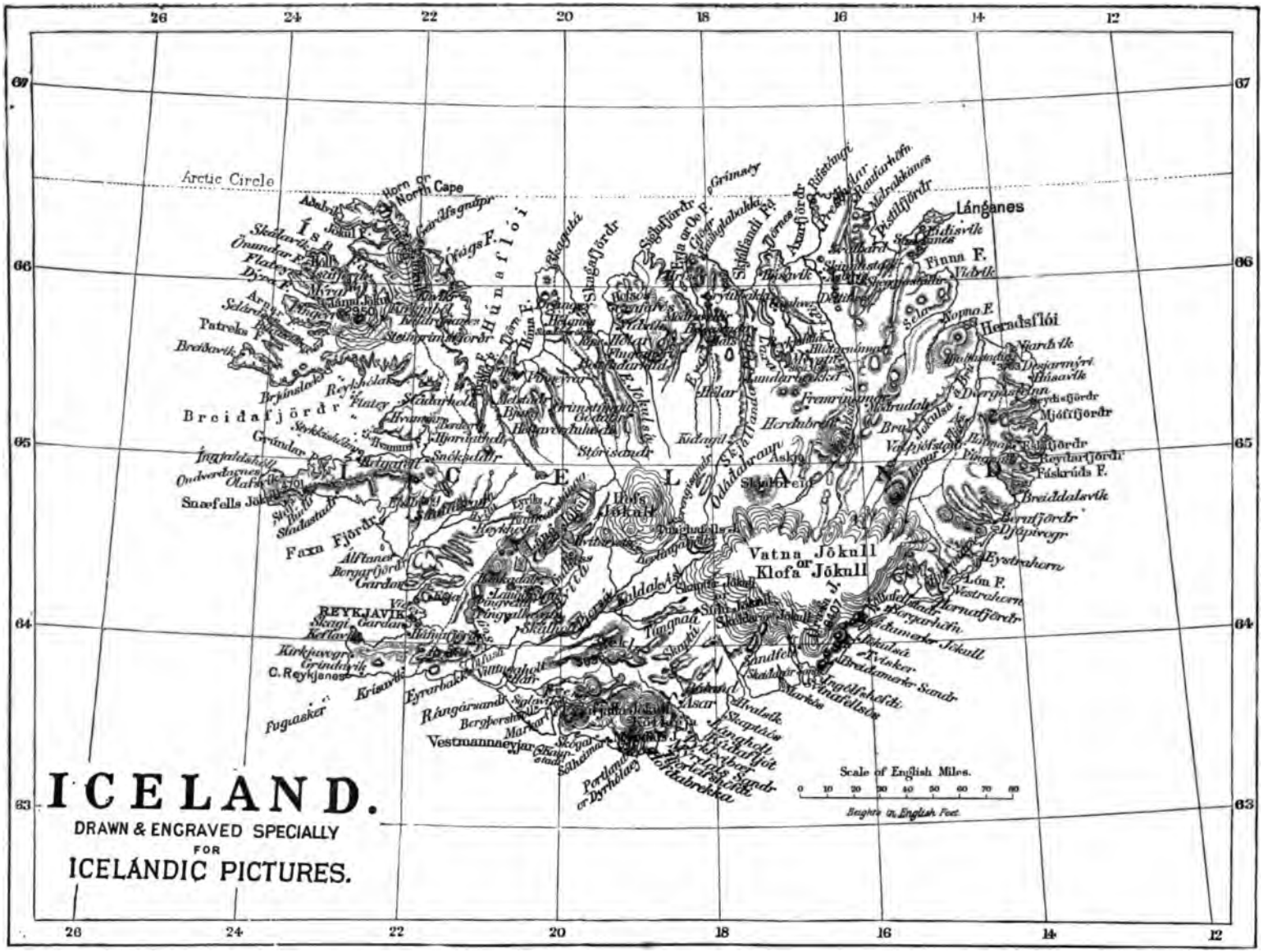
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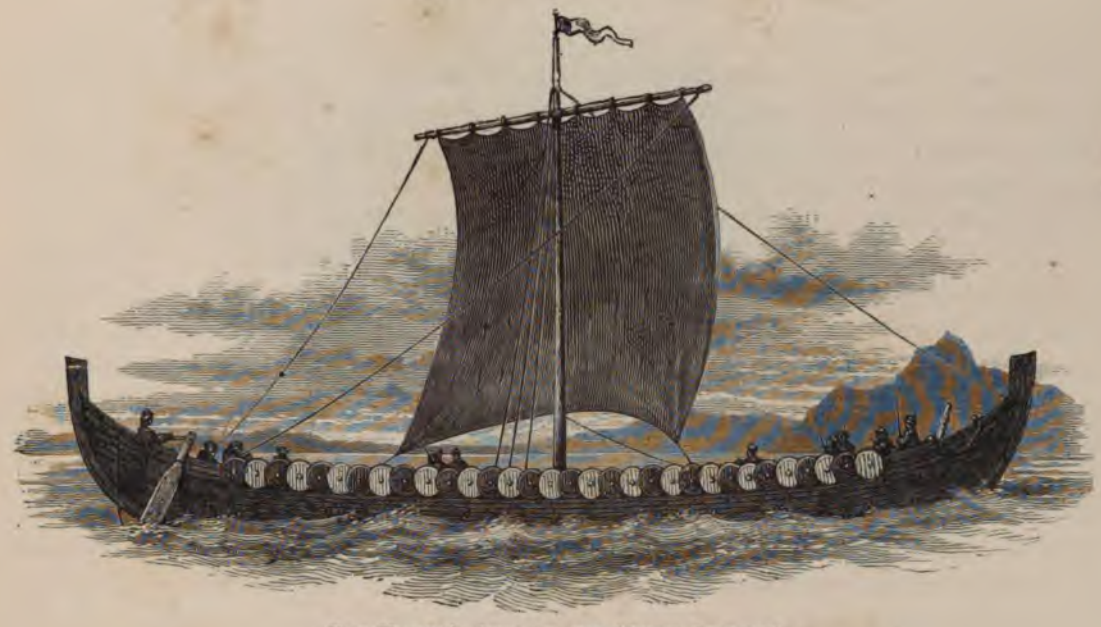
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HEADDRESS OF SILK, AND HORN SPOON.


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FOR
ICELANDIC PICTURES.
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Horn or North Cape
Langanes
Finna F.
Herdubreid
Vatna Jökull
Klofa or Jökull
Hofs Jökull
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Breidafjördr
REYKJAVIK
Vestmannaeyjar
Scale of English Miles.
0 10 20 30 40 50 60 70 80
Heights in English Feet.



THE VIKING'S SHIP OF THE NINTH CENTURY.

CHAPTER I.

THE EXODUS OF THE VIKINGS.

AMONG the many waves of emigration that rolled westward from the plains of Western Asia, where revelation and tradition concur in bidding us seek the cradle of our ancestry, two claim the attention of every man who bears the English name, or speaks the English tongue. The first of these, the Keltic, drifted across Central Europe and the narrow seas until it came to rest on the shores and islands of Gaul and Britain. The second followed in its wake, but with a stronger sweep and a wider reach, till the plains of Northern Europe, from the shores of the Polar Sea to the foot of the Alps, were occupied by the Teuton or his kinsmen.

But to him the ocean opposed no barrier. He threw the energy of his character and the strength of his will into ships of oak, with bolts of iron and sails of leather, and annexed the empire of the sea. From the shores of Jutland, vanguard tribes swarmed across the channel, and the star of the Kelt went down before that of the Saxon. In the woodlands of Britain he rehearsed the scenes which he was destined to enact amid the forests of the New World. A few years later, and again the tide flowed, not as before in the rush of a nation, but in the foray of the chieftain. From the fjords of Norway, the viking or creek-dweller dashed at the Western Isles, like the restless waves of the sea he crossed, and again the Teuton put his yoke on the neck of the Kelt. Orkney, Shetland, the South Isles and Man (Sodor

and Man, as we say to-day) yielded before him. He set up his kingdoms in Dublin, Limerick, and Waterford, and the Northman, as he was now called, ruled over the islands of 'Bretland' or Wales. Nor was this all. He ravaged the coasts of Europe, from the mouth of the Elbe to that of the Danube, and disputed with Charlemagne the empire of the Franks.

But his strength lay in his ships, and as river-mouth after river-mouth was closed against him, he more and more sought the islands of the West. Here the Northman and the Westman formed alliance and friendship. The sons of the viking saw the daughters of Erin that they were fair, and the strength of the Teuton was enriched by the grace of the Kelt. Here, also, many a northern chieftain heard the story of the Cross, which for six hundred years at least had been known on Irish soil.

Meanwhile, other causes than mere love of adventure were driving fresh hosts to the sea. The population was rapidly increasing in homes scattered up and down the narrow strips of green that fringed the fjords of Norway. Forays by the overland route to the south had been checked by the statesmanship of Charlemagne. But worst of all to the freedom-loving spirits of the Norsemen was what they always called the 'overbearing of Harald Haarfagr,' who, encouraged by the success of the Frankish king, and urged on by the challenge of the woman he loved, set himself to bring all Norway under his single rule, whereof the story may be read in *Norwegian Pictures.* Just then came stirring news from the Northern Ocean. One of the viking brotherhood, Naddodr by name, while on the voyage from Norway to his eyrie in the Faröes, had been driven, by a tempest, far out of his course till there rose before him the dark cliffs and narrow inlets of an unknown coast. Up one of these great rocks he climbed, but found no sign of life. As he was leaving, a sudden storm covered the hills with a mantle of snow, from which he called his discovery Snjoland, or Snowland. This was in 860. Four years later Garthar Svavarsson, a Swede, fell in with the new land, whereon he built a house in which he spent a winter. The spot, called Húsavík or Housebay, on that account, is on the eastern shore of Skálfandi, one of the northern fjörds. During the next summer he sailed around the island, called it Gartharsholm after himself, and returned to Norway.

Although these events form what is usually called the discovery of Iceland, it is certain from the testimony of Dicuilus, an Irish monk, who wrote in 825, that Culdee wanderers—'Papar,' as the vikings called them—had visited these shores, either in search of fresh conquests for the Cross, or to secure shelter for themselves. If the latter were the case, no wonder that they kept the secret. Papey and Papa Fjörthr in Southern Iceland bear witness to their presence, as do like names in Shetland and in Orkney.

About the year 867 the first detailed examination of the Northland took place, and the adventures of Flóki, who sailed for Gartharsholm with

his two friends Herjólfr and Thórólfr, form a picturesque story. He carried three ravens, and, after leaving the Faröes, freed them all in turn. The first flew back to the islands, the second returned to the ship, but the third directed its flight to the north; accepting this as an omen, Flóki fared on. He sighted the east coast first, but, being repelled by its apparent barrenness, turned west, and effected a settlement in what is now called Vatnsfjörthr. During his explorations he saw a fjord in the north filled with floating ice, and gave the land, on that account, its present name—'Island,' or Iceland. Disheartened by the severity of the climate, and by the loss of his cattle, for which he kept no proper store of winter food, he returned to Norway two years later. But his companions, the Caleb and Joshua of the party, told a very different story, Thórólfr going so far as to call it a land whose grass dropped butter.

Meanwhile, in Norway, Harald was steadily bearing down all opposition, and step by step extending his iron rule over the fierce spirits whose constant feuds and quarrels called for curb of some kind. In 870, two of these, Ingólfr and Leifr, outlawed for strife more wild than usual, betook themselves to Thórólf's Canaan. Pleased with the prospect, and satisfied as to the possibilities of the new land, they returned to Norway to prepare for permanent settlement, among which preparations may be included a plundering foray on the part of Leifr to Ireland, whence he returned with much booty and a famous sword that earned his later name of Hjörleifr, or Leifr of the Sword.

While these chieftains were absent Harald's blow was struck, and a combination of jarls and vikings was broken up at Hafrs Fjord, near Stavanger, in 872. Rather than submit even then, the sturdy Norsemen preferred to leave their lands, and seek new homes. Some fared 'east-over-the-keel' to Jamtaland, the modern Sweden, but more 'west-over-the-sea' to Hjaltaland or Shetland, to Orkney, the great viking rendezvous, and all the other western lands. Many, doubtless, joined the fleets that were ravaging in France or England, where Alfred had just begun to reign. Not a few awaited the result of Ingólf's expedition. And thus began the exodus of the vikings.

In 874 Ingólfr and Hjörleifr, and their followers, packed their moveables, living and dead, into their famous ships, realised the rest as far as possible, and set sail for the land of promise. On arriving within sight of the snowy dome of the Öræfa Jökull, that monarch of Icelandic mountains, on which the delighted gaze of traveller after traveller has rested, Ingólfr flung overboard his *öndvegissular*, or high seat-pillars, that he might follow where the gods might send them. A sudden storm came on, no unusual thing in these wild northern waters, the pillars drifted off, and the chieftains made for the nearest shore. A long, steep-sided headland juts into the Atlantic, just under the Öræfa Jökull; there Ingólfr landed, and to this day

it bears his name, Ingólfshöfthi. A like but bolder headland, Hjörleifshöfthi, seventy miles to the west, commemorates his kinsman. This Hjörleifr seems to have been a sort of Scandinavian freethinker as well as freebooter, and to have cared as little for the gods as he did for kings or thralls. These last, secured most likely on his Irish expedition, he set to plough his land, whereon they killed him, and fled to a group of islands near at hand, called in consequence, the Vestmannaeyjar, for Irishmen were ever 'Westmen' in those days.

The servants of Ingólfr, who were seeking the pillars, found Hjörleif's dead body, and brought back word to Ingólfr, who pursued the murderers, and cut them off to a man. It was the Teuton and the Kelt again. With the dreadful fate before him of the man who refused to honour the gods, the pious Ingólfr redoubled his exertions to find his poles, and after three years' search, discovered them on the desolate shore of a lava stream in the west. Hard by was a rivulet from a spring in whose bed rose a column of steam. Here, therefore, Ingólfr made his settlement, and called it Reykjavík, the Reeking or Smoking Bay. Having secured eight hundred square miles or so of territory, between Reykjavík and the Olfusá, he died, and was buried on Ingólfsfjall, a hill near Reykir.

In the wake of these pioneers, chief and jarl followed in steady flow, until an event occurred which changed the flow into a rush. Among the sea kings whose lair was in the Orkneys were many who, not content with southern spoils, ravaged in Norway too, thereby repaying Harald's 'overbearing,' till in 880 he determined to clear the islands of ship and viking, root and branch. Gathering a great fleet, he too 'fared west-over-the-sea to Hjaltaland,' and harried his foes from every creek and ness where ship could sail or soldier climb; from Shetland and Orkney to South Isles and Man. And then they fled to Iceland, with many an island kinsman and many an Irish bride.

Prominent among these stands the noble figure of Auth, daughter of Ketil Flatneb, or Flatnose, a name which reminds us that nicknames are by no means inventions of the modern schoolboy. They were as common on the playground of the sea as on that of to-day. Ketil had been sent by Harald long before to subdue the Orkneys, which he did, but, viking-like, he kept his conquest for himself. Later, we find he went to Ireland, where he died. Here Auth married Olaf the White, King of Dublin, but after he died, and her son Thorstein was killed in Scotland, she sailed for Iceland, and settled at Hvamm on Breithafjörthr about 889. Auth, the 'deeply wealthy,' as she was called, was a Christian. Doubtless she sought rest and peace in the Northland, but whether she found it seems more than doubtful, for when she died she ordered that her body should be buried below high water mark, that it might not rest in the heathen land. Her sister Thorun had married Helgi hinn Magri (the lean), and this was another Christian

household. They occupied Eyafjörthr, in the north, in 890, and when the writer was at Akureyri in 1891, he found that a festival had been held the year before in celebration of the one thousandth anniversary of that landing.



ICELANDIC GIRLS IN THE DRESS OF THE NINTH CENTURY.

A kind of historic drama had reproduced, as far as possible, the viking chieftain.

To all Englishmen the figure of the Northman on his war-ship is familiar. He always seems at home amid the clash of sword and swing of battle-axe. But this was not his home. Let us try and realise him there. Just beyond the fjord end, where the ground rises a little from the stream side, stands the group of buildings that form his *bœr*. In front is the *tun*,

or home-field, with its little grass-covered wall. At each front corner of the great hall is a door. We will enter through the furthest, the men's. We note the carving on its posts; we come into the porch, where we shall doubtless find a thrall or two on guard; from this a door leads into the hall itself; right down the centre runs a line of fires; up to the roof rise the smoke-clouds, reddened by the glow beneath, as they curl through the open louvres. The firelight glances from shield, and spear, and sword, hung on the pillars that sustain the open timber roof, or on the wainscot hung between. Sometimes the weapons almost cover carving, rich and stately, which, like the tapestry hanging there, recalls the noble deeds of jarl and chieftain. On each side are long tables, around which sit the household and the guest.



Ancient Icelandic Girdle with Gold Ornaments.

In the centre of the long wall on our left is the main high seat, the place of honour. Its lofty pillars, crowned by carven gods, its finished rails and cushioned seat, befit the hero host at ease. His blue *kyrtyl* is bound around him by a belt of plates of gold, from which projects the inlaid hilt of the 'Fire of the Sea King,' as his skald, or bard, calls his trusty sword. Round his neck is a collar of gold, and a richly-worked brooch of the same binds his scarlet *skykkja*, or cloak, round the edge of which runs a collar of cloth of gold.

On a dais at the end sits his wife; her snow-white headdress with its golden band allows her hair to fall in free untrammelled folds upon her shoulders and her cloak of royal blue This has a border, too, of red and gold embroidered leaves. Her dress is of crimson Eastern stuff, confined by a girdle studded with golden ornaments. From her braceleted wrist hang the insignia of office, her keys and purse. She wears a chain of gold as necklace, and from it, perchance, depends a cross, symbol of Christian faith.

Around are the spoils of the foray; the fidla and harp wait but the call of the lord. Behind the wainscot are recesses, the bedchambers of the *herr*. If the lord were yet a pagan, we should find, not far away, the *hlöf*, or temple, of which he was the priest.

The story of his life cannot be better told than in the graphic words of Dr. Dasent:—'From the cradle to the tomb the life of the Icelandic chief fetters our attention by its poetry

of will and passion, by its fierce, untamed energy, by its patient endurance, by its undaunted heroism. In Iceland in the tenth century it was only healthy children that were allowed to live. As soon as it was born the infant was laid upon the bare ground, and until the father came and looked at it, heard and saw that it was strong in lung and limbs, its fate hung in the balance. That danger over, it was duly washed,



THE VIKING CHIEF OF THE NINTH CENTURY.



THE VIKING'S WIFE OF THE NINTH CENTURY.

signed with the Thunderer's holy hammer—the symbol of all manliness and strength—and solemnly received into the family as the faithful champion of the ancient gods. After the child was named, he was often put out to foster with some neighbour, and there he grew up with the children of the house, and contracted those friendships and affections which were reckoned better and more binding than the ties of blood. A man was of age as soon as he was fit to do man's work, as soon as he could brandish his father's sword and bend his bow.

'But for incapacity that age had no mercy. Society required an earnest and pledge from the man himself that he was worth something. "Place, king!" cries a new guest to a king of Norway. "Place! find a place for yourself! Turn out one of my thanes, if you can. If you can't, you must sit on the footstool;" and so these savages spread themselves over the world to prove their natural nobility. In Byzantium they are the leaders of the Greek emperor's body guard. From France they tear away her fairest provinces. In England they are the bosom friends of such kings as Athelstan, and the sworn foes of Ethelred the Unready. From Iceland as a base they push on to Greenland, and colonise it; nay, they discover America in those half-decked barks.

'All this they do in the firm faith that the eyes of the gods were upon them. Theirs was, in truth, a simple creed; to do something and to do it well, so that it might last as long as the world lasted. They were superstitious, that is, they believed in a false religion; but then they believed in it, which is more than all the professors of a true religion can say. They were proud; but humility is a plant of Christian soil. They believed in luck; this, too, is a belief which a more enlightened age has hardly shaken off. They were revengeful; but revenge was the most sacred duty of a society which knew no voice more awful and impressive than that of a brother's blood calling from the earth.

'Nor let it be supposed that beneath these tall trees of the forest, growth of emotions did not thrive, which are the crown and joy of every-day life. "Weep not for me," says the dying warrior to his wife, "lest those hot tears should scald my bosom and spoil my rest." "I was given young to my husband," says a faithful wife, "and then I promised to live and die with him," and this she sings when the house is blazing over their head, and the foes that surround it offer to let her escape. The Icelanders were the bravest warriors, the boldest sailors, and the most obstinate heathens; but they were the best husbands, the tenderest fathers, and the firmest friends of their day.'

Steadily the stream of immigration poured on till in sixty years from the first settlement fifty thousand persons had made their homes in Iceland. The enormous land-takes of the earliest settlers led to an agreement that no new-comer should possess more than he could compass in a day, keeping, during his progress, within sight of the smoke of a fire kindled before his round began. The institutions and religion of the motherland were soon established on a firm base. Neighbours gathered in the *husthing*, freeholders in the *móthing*, and finally the nation in the *althing*. Odin, Frigga, and Thor ruled as national gods, the last especially in the mind of the Icelander; yet behind them all loomed the shadow of the image of an unknown god, to whom even Odin himself, the Allfather, must bow; and, after the life of man, after the feasts of Valhalla, after the reign of the gods, came the strange foreshadowing of a new heaven and a new earth.

And side by side with the public faith there lived in the Icelander's heart a deeper cult than all. Just as in China now, so in Iceland then, the dead hand lay on the living son, and his ancestors claimed his innermost trust.

The exodus of the vikings has been compared directly or by inference with that of Israel or the Pilgrim Fathers. But the fiery cloud, wherein the Lord of Hosts forewent the former, and the mind of Christ, which so indwelt in the latter, were wanting to the fierce warriors of the north. They left a house of bondage, but only to discover, through years of strife and bloodshed, that of all taskmasters the hardest is self. The Christianity of the earlier settlers seems to have been confined to their own circles, and sometimes to a single generation, though its influence on the future church can easily be traced. In 981, however, Frederick, a Saxon bishop, came into Iceland as a missionary, and in 997 he was followed by Thangbrand, despatched to preach the faith by Olaf Tryggvason, of Norway. Thangbrand's methods appear to have been at least open to criticism, for if opposed he was quite as ready to draw his blade as to argue the point, and quite as willing to feed the fancy of his inquirers with the childish legends of Rome as to tell the story of the Cross. Landing at Berufjörthr, he spent the first winter with Hall at Alftafjörthr, and from Dr. Dasent's translation of the greatest of all Icelandic sagas, that of Burnt Njal, an incident or two may be taken in illustration.

'It so happened one morning that Thangbrand was out early, and made them pitch a tent on land, and sang mass in it, and took much pains with it, for it was a great high day. Hall spoke to Thangbrand and asked,

'"In memory of whom keepest thou this day?"

'"In memory of Michael the Archangel," says Thangbrand.

'"What follows that angel?" asks Hall.

'"Much good," says Thangbrand. "He will weigh all the good that thou doest, and he is so merciful, that whenever any one pleases him, he makes his good deeds weigh more."

'"I would like to have him for my friend," says Hall.

'"That thou mayest well have," says Thangbrand, "only give thyself over to him by God's help this very day."

'"I only make this condition," says Hall, "that thou givest thy word for him, that he will then become my guardian angel."

'"That I will promise," says Thangbrand.

'Then Hall was baptised, and all his household!'

Next spring Thangbrand fares west, and meets a certain skald or bard named Weatherlith, who speaks against the faith, and is promptly slain; 'and then this song is sung about it:

> He who proved his blade or bucklers
> South went through the land to whet
> Brand, that oft hath felled his foeman,
> 'Gainst the forge which foams with song;

Mighty wielders of war's sickle
Made his sword's avenging edge
Hard on hero's helm prop rattle,
Skull of Weatherlith the skald.'

'Forge that foams with song,' and 'hero's helm prop,' stand for the poet's head.

After various other slayings, Thangbrand appears at the Althing, and runs great risk of his life; but the Eastfirthers stand by him, he escapes, and soon after returns to Norway.

That same summer, Hjallti Skeggisson, outlawed for blasphemy, arrived in Norway with Gizur the White, just as King Olaf had imprisoned every Icelander he could lay hands on, in retaliation for what he considered the mischief Thangbrand had received. Then Gizur the White and Hjallti pledged themselves to return at once, if these men were set free, and preach the faith. Olaf agreed, and the two reached Iceland in time to call the Christians round them at the Althing of the year 1000. The war of words ran high, when there came a man who said that a stream of lava had burst out at Ölfus, and would run over the homestead of Thórod the priest. Then the heathen men began to say, 'No wonder that the gods are wroth at such speeches as we have heard.' Then Snorri the priest spoke and said, 'At what then were the gods wroth when this lava was molten and ran over the spot on which we now stand.' The incident was dramatic, and doubtless prepared the way for the momentous decision given by Thorgeir, the Lögsögumathr (law-say-man), or 'speaker' of the house:

'This is the beginning of our laws; that all men shall be Christian here in the land, and believe in one God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, but leave off all idol-worship, not expose children to perish, and not eat horseflesh. It shall be outlawry if such things are proved openly against any man; but if these things are done by stealth, then it shall be blameless.' It was more to the credit of the Icelanders themselves that the last clause disappeared in a few years than that it should ever have been inserted.

When we further hear that the baptism of the Icelanders proved a difficulty until it was arranged that the warm springs of the neighbourhood should be used, and that 'this whetted men much to the building of churches, that it was promised them by the teachers that a man should have place for so many men in the Kingdom of Heaven as might stand in any church that he might let build!'[1] we begin to see something of the nature of the Christianity thus embraced. We hear nothing of conviction of sin in humbled hearts, of free forgiveness and full salvation through the merits of a crucified Saviour. That the Roman Catholicism thus introduced should have been powerless to quell the fierce passions of conflicting clans,

[1] *Eyrbyggja Saga.* Translation by Magnusson and Morris.

is less remarkable than that among the bishops appointed to Icelandic sees, good men and true were found; but such were mainly Icelanders and of Icelandic choice. It was not long before the swords that men had borne in many a foreign raid were turned against each other, and feud and fight stained many an Iceland heath with noble blood. And then the winters came, and round the long fires sat the warriors and the skalds. The fights were fought again in story and in song; the traveller told his tale, and the legends of the past were clothed with life and beauty. And so arose the famous Sagas. Handed down from mouth to mouth, yet told by those who knew to those who knew as well, they show a vivid life-likeness and truthfulness that have earned them a lasting place in the literature of the world.

With the Christian faith there came the use of letters, and then arose the men who gathered up the scattered strains. 'Among the first poets,' says Mr. York Powell, 'the majority are of mixed blood, with an Irish ancestress not far back in the family tree,' and hence the Keltic grace that softened down the Gothic strength. In the 'Eddas' are preserved the records of the earliest faith. The elder, or poetic, ascribed to Sæmundr the Wise of Oddi, and the prose, or younger, to Snorri Sturluson of Reykholt, tell the tale of Odin and his sons, the ancestry of earth and heaven, the Norseman and the Dane. 'The Eddic poems,' says the writer above quoted, 'discover an ideal of beauty, an aerial fairy world, and a love of Nature, which we do not find in the Saga.'

In the *Landnamabók*, we get the chronicles of Iceland, the work of many hands, Ari Frode (the Wise), Kolskegg of like fame, and others. It contains the names of fourteen hundred places, and twice as many persons, a veritable 'Doomsday Book.' It gives the names and homes of all the early settlers.

And then comes Snorri's Saga of the Kings of Norway, known from its opening word as *Heimskringla*, the circle of the world, in which the Iceland Saga man becomes historian of the North, and tells us not of Norway only, but of his own and foreign lands. Of the hosts of single tales some stand out in proud pre-eminence. '*Njala*, the story of Burnt Njal,' says Dr. Dasent, who in lifelike prose and flowing verse has given it to English readers, 'bears away the palm for truthfulness and beauty.' 'As gold to brass,' says Guthbrandr Vigfusson.

Before the year 1200 almost all had been committed to writing in the *Norrœna*, or *Danske tunge*, then the general language of the North, which unchanged survives in Iceland till the present. It must not be mistaken for the *Danske* or modern Danish.

Translations of the *Heitharviga Saga* ('The story of the heath slayings'), the oldest of them all, and the *Eyrbyggja of Ere Dwellers* have just appeared, while a new translation of the *Heimskringla* itself is in progress.

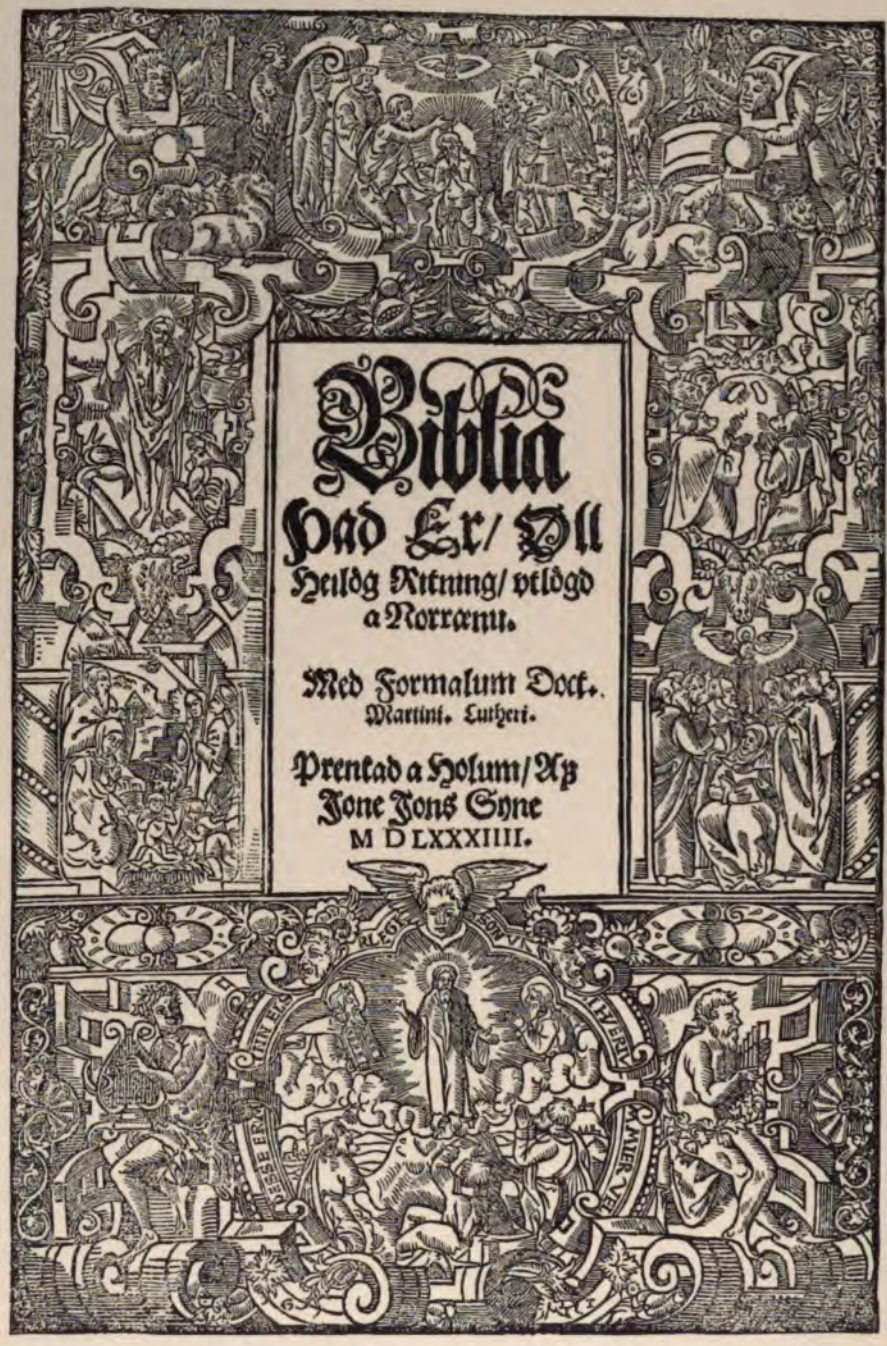
The Sagas are the Sybilline books of Scandinavia, the historical and

geographical treatises of the North, the 'Debrett' of the Icelander and the story-books of his children. They cover the whole realm of literature from theology to ghost stories, from philosophy to fairy tales. Little marvel that they were read till the leaves wore down, patched and mended, and copied and multiplied as no other books ever were, save the Scriptures themselves. In a word, they were the books of a nation, and not of a class.

About the middle of the eleventh century the feuds and turmoils of the greater families had reached a climax, and the tired and wearied Icelanders exchanged their freedom for security with subjection to Hakon, King of Norway, in 1262. The terms were honourable. Their ancient rights and laws remained intact, and the Althing held its ground. But with the freedom passed the fruits of an heroic age. The stream of spoil from foreign lands had ceased to flow. The curb upon the chieftain checked the skald; copying took the place of writing, and then the land began to live upon the memories of the past. Worse and richer grew the church, and Peter's pence soon followed Hakon's. Robbed by indulgence-mongers, fed on saints' tales, with graven images for gods, and wooden blocks for gospels, little wonder that they sank. In 1360 Norway passed into the hands of Denmark, and Iceland with it. In 1420 the Black Death fell on the devoted land, two-thirds of its people died; and when the winter came, all but a tenth of the cattle died.

In the fourteenth century the light of the Reformation broke on the troubled land—not before it was needed, when we find the Bishop of Hólar possessing three hundred farms and pasturage for fifteen thousand cows, in addition to other emoluments; and Ögmund, Bishop of Skalholt, snatching a German Gospel of St. Luke from the rector of his cathedral and flinging it into the courtyard. Yet under this man's roof, in a cell hidden away in a cow-house, Oddr Gottchalksson, who had entered his employment, was, in his spare moments, quietly translating the New Testament into Icelandic for the first time. He finished St. Matthew's Gospel there, and the rest at Reykium in 1539. The same year he went to Denmark, and in 1540 returned with the printed edition. In the same year Ögmund resigned, and Gissr Einarsson was appointed bishop by Christian III. of Denmark. During his episcopate of six years the Reformation made great progress in the south, aided not a little by his upright life and pious character.

In 1547 Gissr was succeeded by Marten Einarsson, whose gentle disposition made him a poor match for the turbulent priest who still held the northern see. This man, Jón Arason, took arms against the truth, and marching south to Skalholt, dug up the pious Gissr's body, which he flung into a ditch, took his brother bishop Marten prisoner, and dragged him off to Hólar. Christian summoned him to Denmark, but he refused to go. In 1550, however, he was apprehended on a royal warrant, and failing a ship to carry him to Denmark, was tried by the Althing, and executed with his



THE OLD TESTAMENT TITLE PAGE (REDUCED) OF THE FIRST PRINTED ICELANDIC BIBLE.
(*Size of original block* 10¾ *inches by* 7 *inches.*)

two sons. The act might well have been omitted, but the hand that stirred the strife was his. With him died the strength of any opposition to the Reformation, and in 1551 the Church of Iceland assumed the Lutheran form.

When, on the Day of Pentecost, the disciples were 'all filled with the Holy Spirit,' they went out in the new-born power of that Spirit's strength to 'speak with other tongues,' and every man heard 'in his own language' the mighty works of God. And when, nearly fifteen centuries later, chosen witnesses of God in Iceland were filled with that same Spirit, they in like manner began to give to every man 'in his own language' the mighty works of God. In 1562, Olaf Hjaltason, first Protestant Bishop of Hólar, issued a *Guthspialla Bók*, an order of the Gospels and Epistles for Church use. And in the providence of God facilities were close at hand for printing, since Arason had brought a press to Iceland, wherewith to multiply his maledictions on the men of God whose work he sought to hinder. In 1584 Guthbrandr Thorlaksson, next bishop of the North, produced the first complete Icelandic Bible. In the New Testament, he used the excellent work of Oddur Gotschalksson with slight revision, and of the whole it has been said that it may 'compare with our own authorised version for purity and strength.' The handsome workmanship and the speed wherewith the work was done, tell of the translator's love and care, and of blessing on the labour, which when done is said to have 'kindled a brighter light in the Icelandic Church than she had enjoyed at any previous time.' Frederic II. contributed towards the expense, and ordered every church in Iceland to subscribe one rix-dollar (about four shillings) and to buy a copy, for which the richer churches paid from ten to twelve rix-dollars, while poorer ones might buy for eight or ten. Yet so far had Iceland sunk, that many were unable to find the two pounds or so which this sum represents, and out of the ten thousand printed, many were given free.

The text was arranged in paragraphs, enriched with capitals and cuts, while Luther's preface, notes, and references were added. In 1644 the second great edition was issued by Thorlakr Skulason, Guthbrandr's successor. Guthbrandr's translation was compared with that of Resenius. The paragraphs were divided into verses, initials and cuts were added as before, and this edition, of which one thousand copies, too, were printed, became the one in standard use. In 1747 it was reproduced at Copenhagen, and Lawrence Stistrup, a Danish merchant, bought 596 copies for free distribution among the poorest Icelanders. Three years later the New Testament portion was issued separately, and Lawrence Stistrup again came forward with a noble gift of 1693 copies. In 1800 a few Danish pastors discovered that the Word of God had again become very scarce in Iceland, and resolved to send two thousand copies. The British and Foreign Bible Society, hearing of this, sent Dr. Henderson and Mr. Paterson to Copenhagen, and as a result of their inquiries requested that the issue should be increased to five

thousand at its expense. Of these, two thousand were sold, and three thousand distributed. The text was taken from the edition of 1747, with certain alterations which have not been thought improvements. In 1813 the whole Bible was issued, £150 being provided by the Edinburgh Bible Society; £120 by some friends of the circulation of the Scriptures in Holstein; £62 by the pastors who began the movement, and the rest by the British and Foreign Bible Society. The five thousand copies were issued, and five thousand additional Testaments. In 1814, Henderson travelled through Iceland with the books, which were everywhere most gratefully received.

The effect of the Reformation, from a literary point of view, was not confined to the acquisition of the Scriptures, for in addition to the numerous other works of Guthbrandr Thorlaksson, his assistant, Arngrim Jonas, produced numerous volumes on theology, history, law, etc.; and Biorn of Skarthstad took up the broken thread of native annals from 1400 to 1645. But the cloud of misfortune still rested on the land. In 1602 the trade was farmed by the Danish Government to a monopolist Copenhagen company, with the natural consequence that prices of imported goods rose threefold, while those of exports fell. Nor were the imports luxuries alone, for they include the corn, the salt, the fishing-lines, on and by which the people live. Although the results were such as even to bring downright starvation into many homes, yet in 1684 the whips were changed to scorpions, and Icelanders forbidden to trade at all, except through the company. In the same century pirates from England, France, and even from Algiers, fell on the feeble folk, and repaid to them their fathers' deeds. In 1707 small-pox struck eighteen thousand victims down. Half a century later an epidemic caused the loss of half-a-million sheep, and then came fearful winters, during which the cattle died, and pestilence and famine swept ten thousand people off. In 1783 the earth beneath them opened and belched forth streams of lava, showers of ashes, floods of boiling waters; and thirteen hundred Icelanders were drowned or starved or poisoned, with twenty thousand horses, one hundred and thirty thousand sheep, and many cattle.

The land could bear no more; the cramping bands which fettered trade were loosened, and better days began. The Althing, which for nine hundred years had met beneath the open heaven, was closed in 1800, but re-opened at Reykjavik in 1845. The relations between the Icelanders and Denmark have been a constant source of trouble, but they never once forsook their right to be governed by their ancient laws. In recent times arose a patriotic statesman, Jón Sigurthsson, who won the cause of freedom, of which the goal was reached in 1874, when Iceland celebrated the thousandth anniversary of its birth, and from the King of Denmark in person received the constitution which it claimed, as the crown of its millennial joys.



COLLECTING EGGS IN THE FARÖE ISLANDS.



THE EIDER DUCK.

CHAPTER II.

EN ROUTE AND THE FARÖE ISLANDS.

HOWEVER great may be the interest of historic Iceland, it is none the less attractive in the marvellous natural phenomena which everywhere claim our attention, and repay our examination. We have all heard of its boiling springs and its Great Geysir; and to Etna and Vesuvius, memories of our schooldays, we ever add a most exaggerated Hekla. But Hekla is only one of a score among Icelandic vents, and by no means the loftiest or most terrible. Nor are the springs confined to a single valley, nor to a given district.

Iceland moss and Iceland spar are known, at least as well as Iceland poppies; but what of zeolites, chalcedonies, and agates, that lie on many a hillside, or shine like stars on sable sands. Trees, it is true, are few and small, but hues as of an Indian summer foliage are to be seen on scores of crumbling screes and mountain sides; and clothing all is an atmosphere so clear, so bright, that rocks a mile away seem close at hand. Yet wild and savage grandeur everywhere predominates. Great mountains crowned with sparkling snows, and girt with glittering glaciers; swirling torrents, foaming fosses, dreary deserts, vast morasses, in ever-changing alternation, combine to give the land a character essentially unique.

Last, but by no means least, the whole is free. No roads, no fields, no walls, no hedges, no 'notices to trespassers,' restrict the traveller's progress. Go where he will, or how, the only limit is his power. Reindeer

for boating trips for the shooting, except the eider duck, fish for the angling except in a few of the many salmon streams, flowers for the gathering all await us; and when the day's work ends, a hearty welcome at the first farmhouse whatever the traveller's plight whatever the hour.

How are we to reach this wizard land? Two companies provide communication. The Leith and Iceland Steamship Company by the Magnetic, from Leith or direct from Newcastle, and the United Steamship Company of Copenhagen by the Laura and the Thyra from Copenhagen calling at Granton. The Magnetic makes about half-a-dozen trips during the summer, mainly to bring back cargoes of sheep and horses and so her return dates are not always to be depended on. The Laura and the Thyra are the Danish mail boats and keep up regular communication with Reykjavik through the year while one of them the Thyra as a rule goes round the north coast to Leith three or four times during the summer, beginning about the 1st of May when the sheer ice has disappeared from the Arctic fjords. There is not much difference in the size of the boats, and the saloon fare is the same in each. The Danish boats carry also second-class passengers who eat at the Faroe Islands and as Icelanders and Danes are both of them anxious to gather all the sort of knowledge and of interest that is to be had, [illegible] the voyage of sixteen days is a round the coast journey. It should be noted that on hurried run to Reykjavik and back [illegible]. The Thyra has a North cabin, her genial Englishspeaking officers and few but their passengers the towering hills and crystal fjords that [illegible] panorama as the steamer calls from time to time at the different stops at trading stations, the interchange of greetings between the [illegible] glimpses here and there of the Icelandic life [illegible] perfect picture and leave the happiest memories.

Between the eastern coast of Iceland and Granton lie some seven hundred miles of sea which [illegible] four to five days. To Reykjavik from Leith [illegible] eight hundred miles must be reckoned as the shortest route. In either case [illegible] among the Faroe Islands a visit of [illegible] hours. Forty-four hours after leaving the Forth we [illegible] Sumburgh Head, the southernmost and Shetland's northern point. Off to the right [illegible] between the Orkneys and the Shetlands. There [illegible] Sumburgh Head [illegible] Sumburgh lost his ship. [illegible] Faroes. One after another [illegible] changes as we [illegible] fortresses of towering [illegible] Wherever [illegible] round those of Faroe [illegible] steamer [illegible] southward.

from the northern end of which the Faröe summits rise, and here the eastern Arctic currents meet the warm Gulf Stream. Over the cold stream leaps the warm, forcing its waters down to the bank, which reflects them deeper still. But the warm stream brings the fog and rain, which, with the winds and swirling currents, encircle and enwrap these lonely peaks.

The name is derived from *faar*, a sheep, and *öe*, an island, and tells at once its Scandinavian origin, as Fairfield does in Westmorland, which has no more to do with fair than field, but is just Faar-Fjeld, the sheep hill. The group consists of five-and-twenty islands, on seventeen of which are found the dwellings of a hardy, handsome race. Of all the sea kings' sons, perhaps the Faröe men have kept the nearest to the grand old viking type. Here one meets in greater frequency than in any other northern land the tall, commanding form, the blue eye, and the flowing hair, that Norway often fails to show, and Iceland seldom has. A Faröe crew is a splendid sight, their great, good-humoured faces, their massive shoulders and well-proportioned limbs, that seem to hold reserve of strength for anything, mark them at once as men of trust and power.



A Faröe Islander.

And their dress is quite in keeping. A home-made coat of blue or brown or blackish woollen stuff, rough and comfortable like themselves, surmounts a pair of breeches reaching to the knee. Of these the seam is open for the last few inches, and this, with the horn-shaped cap of soft and dark red cloth, that hangs in curly folds at side or rear, gives an air of *abandon* to the whole. Their legs are cased with thick grey stockings, their feet are thrust into sheepskin shoes or slippers, the lace of which is crossed around the ankle. But the shoe itself is often slipped into the thongs of a mighty sandal, whose solid wooden sole three full inches thick,

is meant of course to keep its owner clear of the bilge water of his boat, or the reeking herbage of his land. Into his belt is always stuck the sheath of his fisher's knife.

Away to the left lies Sutheröe, the South Isle. The Monk, of the older maps, has disappeared, engulfed in 1885. The two Dimons, Lille and Store, that is Little and Great Diamonds, come well in view. The first of these supports but a few half-wild sheep. The other, whose sea-bird haunted sides rise so precipitously that not a single proper landing-place exists, is, notwithstanding this, inhabited. Access to the shelves on which the people live can only be obtained by climbing up a wall of rock, in which some footholds have been cut. And now we come into a labyrinth of fjords. The scene is wonderful and grand. The islands are volcanic in their origin, the peaks and ridges of basaltic rock, of trap or stair formation, thrust from beneath the waves by some remote upheaval, that tore and rent the mass asunder. Of present action there is none, except, perhaps, a warm spring or two.

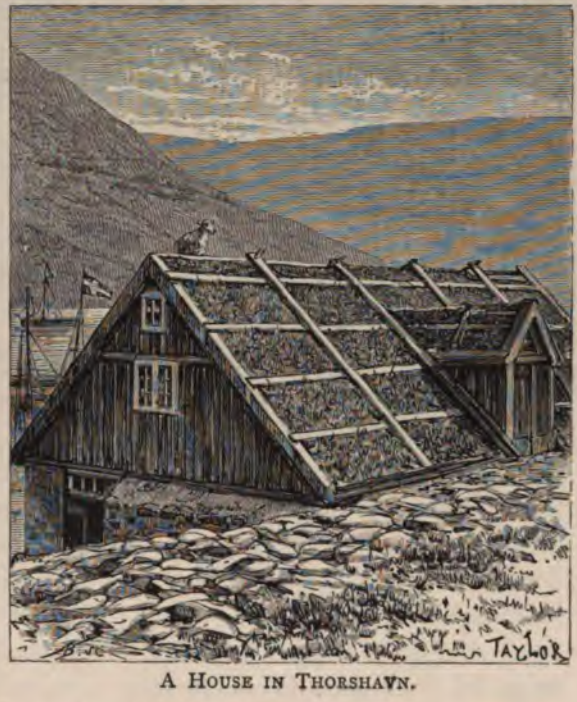
No wonder that the Norsemen saw in them the masonry of giants, for as we look we see the rock arranged in ponderous level layers of blackened basalt, regular and even, courses a hundred feet in thickness, built in perfect order, with shallow, crumbling layers of dull-red, clayey tufa, from one to three feet thick, for mortar. Course above course recedes, as the building of the Pyramids, leaving room for strips of verdure, which lie in emerald bands. From the indigo hue of the fjord to the bright-blue sky above, and the fleecy clouds that cap the peaks, the traveller's gaze must rise in admiration at the wonderful works of God.

The theory of the formation of these terraced piles is that the basalt was poured out in a molten mass over the ocean beds, in quantity sufficient for a single layer, not from one but many vents, flattened beneath the water's weight, and covered, when cold, by a deposit of clayey matter; that over this came another layer, from vents which pierced the first, and so on to the end; but whether this be so or not cannot here be debated. If we look again at an island cliff, we shall find that here and there a line of rock or a chimney-like gap runs right from bottom to top, marking the line of an upward flow, and forming the wall-like 'dykes' of these and similar coasts. In cooling, the mass of the dyke has frequently taken a crystalline form, and the streams which curtain the slopes, have found their way into the pile, freezing and forcing the blocks asunder, and turning the dykes into cataract beds; while below, the sea has scooped, and bored, and drilled the cliff into caverns, and cloisters, and arches.

As we enter the strait between Naalsöe and Strömöe, our attention is called to an arch like a needle's eye, piercing right through the former, whence its name—Needle Island. Swinging round to the west, our anchor is dropped in Thorshavn Bay, and off goes a boat with a dozen bags of

mails. Into the bay runs a spit of rock, covered with dark-brown wooden warehouses, stocked with fish, behind which lies the queerest heap of a town imaginable. Like Bowness on Windermere, its houses have just been pitched down anywhere, and you climb up its narrow and tortuous streets, twisting and wriggling to right and to left, till the open hill-side is gained.

Of the three F's of the Faröes—the fish, and the fowl, and the flesh—the first strikes one at Thorshavn everywhere. The rocks by the water are covered with split-open cod, which are salted and sun-dried by turns. Here comes a procession of women, each pair with a litter between them, on which lies a heap of the crisp, white, finished fish. They are taking them down to the boats for export. Round the post-office door stands a group of girls, waiting for letters, chattering and laughing the while; some seem to be hard-worn already like the women below, but several are really good-looking. They have shawls round their shoulders, and over their heads a handkerchief folded, or nothing at all. The houses are far better than the general appearance of the town would lead one to expect. Built of timber from Norway, on substantial foundations of stone; painted black, brown, or red, with the window-frames picked out in white, and crowned by a roof of grass sods, they often look cosy and clean. The windows are frequently curtained and filled with a bank of flowers. A little stream flows into the harbour, and a reach of it, just above the town, is plainly the laundry of Thorshavn. By its side runs a species of roadway, and here and there are some houses built in line, with flower and potato patches in front. To the right is the Governor's house, a substantial stone building, and to the left the courthouse. On the gateposts of one of the houses I noticed a bill announcing a meeting, with a line or two about 'Jesu Christ.' While I was looking, there came up a man.



A House in Thorshavn.

'Would you like to go in?'

'By all means, if I may.' So we entered, and found there a Scotchman, who, as well as the native who spoke to me first, was kindness itself. He is acting, it seems, as missionary here in connection with the Plymouth Brethren. He had married a Faröese wife, and his interest in the islanders

was evidently very keen. For a long time he had laboured alone, but shortly before our visit had been joined by another helper and his wife. Knowing how strenuously some of the Danish Lutherans have opposed the work of the Free Churches, I naturally inquired—

'And how do you get on with the priests?'

'On the whole very well,' said he. 'Some of them didn't like our coming, and one has written very bitterly against us, but of late there is more spiritual light and life among the people.'

If the manhood of the Lutheran Church has not fulfilled the brilliant promise of its infancy, some of the causes are not far to seek. The retention of baptismal regeneration, in however subtle a form, was certain in time to over-cloud the truth of a present and full salvation through personal faith in Jesus Christ. And the shackles of officialism, to which the Lutheran Church so soon submitted, make one wish for a voice to say, 'Loose him, and let him go.' Throughout the Danish Empire, for example, the texts from which the pastors preach are stereotyped, and fixed for every church, and every Sunday in the year; and the set is plodded through and through again, until the State is pleased to change the order or the set! The results are strange and contradictory. That Christianity commands respect throughout the north, is plain to every traveller; so are its fruits of general honesty and truthfulness, of widespread knowledge and content. Yet side by side with these are instances of Sabbath evening desecration, which make one feel that some at least have learnt to look on Christianity rather as a code of the *duties* which a man may do, and then be free to please himself, than as an all-possessing, changing *power*, to give a man new hopes, new pleasures, new desires, and enable him to put away the past, and all its deeds. The Faröes belong to Denmark absolutely, and Danish is the language of the church, the court, and of the school or two which have been set up to supplement that universal education of the home which is the pride of Iceland and of Faröe.

The State has placed a dean and half-a-dozen priests in charge of the nine-and-thirty parishes into which the hundred Faröe villages are grouped, so it is manifest that many a church can have its priest but seldom. However, this does not hinder worship, for the people meet at church, and the service and a homily are read by one of the parishioners. Faröese, the home-tongue of the people, is next akin to old Icelandic, and yet it has no literature. The Saga of the Faröes is in Icelandic, whose own exuberance perhaps repressed its kinsman's growth, till Danish took its place. A ballad or two represents all that exists of the written tongue. St. Matthew's Gospel has been translated by Pastor Schräder, but not in such a manner as to be understanded of the people.

In the gardens already mentioned a few turnips and carrots may be found. Fruits are represented chiefly by red currants, but gooseberries and

strawberries succeed occasionally. Potatoes thrive, and, with dried fish and rye or barley-bread, form the staple food of the Faröemen. As for the sheep, there is mutton, mutton everywhere, but not a chop to eat, for slaughtering takes place but once a year. Most of the flesh is hung up to dry for six or eight months, and then eaten raw, like the fish. Now and then a cow is killed, if useless as a milker. The population of the islands was 12,954 in 1890. Thorshavn, which fifty years ago had but 800, now numbers 1300, and is increasing still. In its shops may be purchased lovely models of the high-stemmed native boats, and whale-knives of beautiful workmanship. The hard, black, polished wooden-sheaths of the latter are bound with inlaid rings of brass, between each of which is an inlaid figure of a boat, a whale, a harpoon, or a hook, in brass or pearl. Good home-knit hose abound, of which the islanders export 140,000 pairs per annum. The wages of a man average about two shillings and threepence a day in Thorshavn, but in the country half as much, and food.

Commerce, like that of Iceland, languished long under Danish monopoly, till, in 1874, King Christian IX. visited Thorshavn on his way to Iceland, and granted free trade, in memory of which the monument was built that crowns a hill above the town. Besides the buildings seen already, there are the neat, commodious Lutheran church, and a ruinous old fort, that serves as a promenade or prison; nor must we quite forget a decent inn, where a storm-tossed traveller may perhaps enjoy a meal on *terra firma*. I met there the captain of a French fishing-smack, who had entered a Faröe fjord with a rattling breeze behind him. All went well, till a sudden turn revealed the end of the *cul-de-sac!* Too late to slacken, no room to turn, so out leaped the boat like a flying-fish. Now he, a sadder but wiser man, was arranging to pull her off. Whales make the same mistake sometimes, and both may well be pardoned, for the chasm-like rifts that separate the islands are often no wider than the gulfs which penetrate the shores of Osteröe and Strömöe.



WHALE KNIVES USED IN THE FARÖE ISLANDS.

If the path by the stream be followed beyond the town, it will be found to lead on to the open moorland. To the right are the bare bleak rocks that everywhere characterise the Faröe uplands, to the left is an extensive peat moss, from which much of the Thorshavn fuel is obtained. It is cut in thick narrow strips and laid in heaps to dry; and here are some women carrying loads of it on their backs in baskets or creels, which are called *leiber*. If the distance is too great, or the quantity considerable, a

pony may be employed, two of these wooden baskets being placed across his back pannier fashion. Sometimes the bottom is made to hinge at one end, so that the load may be dumped by withdrawing a pin. Of wheeled vehicles there are none, simply because there are no roads.

About an hour from the town there is a beautiful little waterfall known as the Sværtefoss, or Black Force, well worth a visit, the contrast between its creamy foam and the rich black of the rocks being very striking. Wherever it can get a hold, the pretty tormentil may be seen. The Faröese use it extensively for tanning. They pound the root with a stone, and make it into a kind of paste with water. The hair is scraped off the



THE CHURCH AND SCHOOL AT THORSHAVN.

skin, and this paste applied. The skin is folded several times and put away. After some days they wash and dry it, and repeat the process. Landt tells us also that the *Geranium sylvaticum* is used with copperas for producing a black dye. Lycopodium and Dutch clover give a yellow, while purple or violet-red is obtained from dyers' lichen, and brown from stone-moss. Around are birds in plenty. That gawky white one with his black head, his long legs, and his curious curved beak, is an oyster-catcher. Sometimes, it seems, he is the caught instead, when a stronger fish than usual closes his shell on the intrusive beak, and holds the aggressor captive, till he is seized by a native or a bird of prey.

The chief interest of these islands lies in and upon the rocks that form them. We have already seen something of the general aspect of their magnificent formation, but the more closely they are examined the more

interesting do they become. Allan and Mackenzie tell us that the great layers of trappean basalt are mainly composed of greenstone, porphyritic



THE OYSTER-CATCHER.

greenstone, and porphyritic slate, while in the beds of tufa and amygdaloid which separate them are to be found the sources from which have come the finest zeolites and chalcedonies that decorate the cabinets of Europe.

Opal is by no means uncommon, and the cavities in which these beautiful minerals occur are frequently lined with a sparkling network of crystallised quartz.

The zeolites, or boiling stones—so called because their radiant fan-like crystals swell when heated—are generally found on the lower levels, principally in the numerous sea caves that penetrate the island shores. Chalcedonies, on the other hand, occur at higher levels, and may be found in fissures among the rocks. The number of varieties of band, stalactite, or of grape-like character, almost rivals that of the zeolites, nor need one fear lest the stock should be exhausted, for fresh specimens are continually being laid bare, and in the laboratories of the rocks new ones are constantly being formed.

Opposite Thorshavn lies the Island of Naalsöe, where, says Mackenzie, 'almost every circumstance of importance in the geology of Faröe is to be seen, and where the greatest variety of the individual minerals which occur in trap are to be found. The surfaces of many lavas which I passed over in Iceland were not unlike coils of rope or crumpled cloth, an appearance which we should expect to be assumed by any viscid matter in motion. On our first visit to the Island of Naalsöe we observed the surface of a bed of amygdaloid, which had been exposed to a considerable extent by the removal of a bed above, exhibiting an exact picture of the lavas I had seen in Iceland.'

Masses of cavernous chalcedony as large as four feet by two feet have been discovered in the south of Osteröe, near Lamhave, while Thorsvig, Quivig, and Westmannshavn, in Stromöe, abound in zeolites of every kind. These two islands are separated by a channel celebrated for its waterfalls, but navigable only by small ships, on account of a reef, which crosses it near the centre. A yacht passed safely through some time ago, but a brig, attempting the same passage, came to grief. The native rowing boats, however, offer an excellent means of communication, for which a regular and very moderate scale of charges fixed by the Government is in operation throughout the group. The time chosen for an excursion must always depend upon the tide, which sweeps backwards and forwards through the islands with enormous force, in what the natives call the westfall and the eastfall, every six hours. Nothing can be more delightful than to be carried swiftly and easily onward with the flood, but there are many points where the crew of an eight-oared boat will struggle in vain *against* the current. In stormy weather, when the force of the winds is added to that of the waves, the outlying islands become unapproachable, and there are dismal stories of pastors having been imprisoned on Fuglöe and Myggenaes for months together.

The headlands of the west are exposed to the full fury of the Atlantic, and when the spring gales dash the heavy tides against their battered

bosses, it is said the waves are sometimes hurled three hundred feet aloft. At Quivig, where the surge that sweeps up Vaagöe Fjord meets the coast of Stromöe, it rolls among the rocks and caves like 'thunder or a long and heavy cannonade.' On land, the gales are even worse, for, as they strike the sloping hill-sides, layers upon layers of storm-wind are concentrated on the upper levels, till they seize the turf, and tear it from the rock, 'roll it together like a sheet of lead,' and fling it down the valleys.

It is only natural that a coast subject to such attacks should offer rock scenery of surpassing grandeur. In Sandöe and at Westmannshavn there are caves whose remoter ends are connected with the open air by shafts, like that of Tol-Pedn-Penwith in Cornwall, from which are ejected columns of spray and foam as the waves thunder in beneath, and the compressed air is driven before them. But it is on the northern coasts that the cliffs rise highest and display the greatest magnificence. At Tindholm is a fine natural arch, surrounded by singular and grotesque rocks, soaring like spires into the sky; at Myggenaes the basalt has formed pillars as at the Giant's Causeway, of which indeed this group, with the intermediate Staffa and Eigg, of Western Scotland, may almost be regarded as a continuation. On Vaagoe are *Trollkonefinger*, or Witch Fingers, and winding caverns, inhabited by seals and waterfowl. At Myling, on Stromöe, the cliffs rise 2500 feet in perpendicular height, and at the most northerly point of the same island is a cliff with a natural tunnel a few feet above sea level, which Landt estimates at 200 feet in length, through which he says he saw the sun sink into the ocean.

The whole culminates in the Slattaretind near Eide, in Oesteröe, which rises to the height of 2900 feet. Allan, speaking of these northern heights, says: 'Although the sea was certainly more agitated than we expected, all inconvenience it occasioned was soon absorbed in the stupendous grandeur of the scene that opened upon us. From the north coast of Waagoe all the way to Eide, we had a continuous series of magnificent cliffs, towering in many places, like minarets, to the height of 2000 feet. Here a part of the coast is separated from the rest, and appears to have formed a barrier or wall in front, the ruins of which now only remain. In one place, where the largest portions stands highly elevated from the water, an immense perforation, like a grand portal, presents itself, through which boats of any size may row in safety. The rest of this reef presents a series of fantastically shaped rocks, many of them acute pyramids, denominated *Drengs* in the language of the country.' Eide itself is one of the neatest villages in Faröe, and its roomy and well-built houses invite the presence of visitors, who would find a hospitable welcome. Near it are two extremely curious rocks, called the Giant and his Wife, each about 240 feet in height, through the bottom of the latter of which the sea has worn a hole, so that at a certain distance it looks like a colossal statue. At Andfjord, on the

same island, is an enormous rocking-stone, standing in the water, by which it is kept in almost constant motion.

Magnificence, however, is not all that the Faröeman sees in these towering piles, for in addition to the scanty harvest of the earth, and the more plentiful one of the sea, he finds here another of the air, since the galleries and corridors which occur wherever the basalt courses are separated by tufa layers are the homes of countless thousands of sea-birds. This is especially the case on all the western coasts, which face the prevailing winds, for Providence leads the birds almost invariably and instinctively to fly against the wind when they leave their nests in search of food, lest they should be driven away from the land, should it suddenly rise, and also, of course, that they may have its aid when returning.

Mr. Nicol gives the following account of one of these bird cliffs, extracted from Graba and Landt:—'Westmannshaven, on the western side of this island, is a good harbour, but more remarkable for the flocks of sea-fowl that frequent the surrounding rocks. The Vogelberg, as it is called, lies in a frightful chasm, encompassed by inaccessible rocks, said to be a thousand feet high. The entrance is by a narrow passage, on leaving which one finds himself between the precipitous shores of the island on the one hand, and an equally lofty rock on the other, which shelter the enclosed space from every wind. Here nothing is seen but multitudes of birds. Thousand of guillemots and auks swim in groups around the boat, look curiously at the traveller, and vanish beneath the water to rise in his immediate neighbourhood. The black guillemot comes close to the very oars, the seal stretches his head above the waves, not comprehending what has disturbed the repose of his asylum, while the rapacious skua pursues the puffin and gull. High in the air the birds seem like bees clustering about the rocks, whilst lower they fly past so close that they might be knocked down with a stick. But not less strange is the domicile of this colony. On some low rocks scarcely projecting above the water sit the glossy cormorants, turning their long necks on every side. Next are the skua-gulls, regarded with an anxious eye by the line of kittywakes above. Nest follows nest in crowded rows along the whole breadth of the rock, and nothing is visible but the heads of the mothers, and the white rocks between. A little higher on the narrow shelves sit the auks and guillemots, arranged as if on parade with their white breasts to the sea, and so close that a hailstone could not pass between them. The puffins take the highest station, and though scarcely visible, betray themselves by flying backwards and forwards. The noise of such a multitude of birds is confounding, and one cannot hear even his next neighbour speak. The harsh tones of the kittywake are heard above the whole, the intervals being filled by the monotonous note of the auk, and the softer voice of the guillemot. When here, Graba was tempted by the sight of a crested guillemot to fire a gun.

'What became of it,' says he, 'I know not. The air was darkened by the birds roused from their repose.'

> 'Who can recount what transmigrations there
> Are annual made? What nations come and go?
> And how the living clouds on clouds arise,
> Infinite wings! till all the plume-dark air
> And rude resounding shore are one wild cry.'

Probably the puffin may be the most numerous. During the month of May the Faröese live almost entirely upon their eggs, and five thousand of the birds themselves are said to have been caught on Store Dimon in three days, yet the divers captured throughout the islands amount to not less than two hundred and fifty thousand per annum.

On the Isle of Tindholm some eagles used to build, one of which swooped down one day on a child that lay a little distance from its mother, and swept off with it to its eyrie on a rock so lofty and so steep that no bird-catcher had ever dared to climb it; but the poor mother followed, and with torn and bleeding fingers reached the nest, only to find the infant dead.

The Faröemen secure the birds in nets, and few more perilous means exist of finding food than this. Sometimes two men ascend a bird-cliff from beneath. A rope unites them, and the lower has a pole, by which he thrusts the other up until he finds a footing. He then hoists his comrade by the rope. But perhaps more frequently a man is lowered from above, and when he finds a gallery full of birds he swings himself into the open, that the recoil may land him on the shelf. The ropes are strong, ranging up to two or three inches in diameter, and where they pass over the edge of the cliff an attempt is made to prevent fraying by letting them run over a piece of wood; but no precaution of this kind avails with the lower ledges, nor can the men above see what is going on five hundred feet below, where the man whose life they hold, hangs with a thousand feet of space beneath him. By a smaller cord he lets them know when to raise and when to lower.

More irregular as a source of food and wealth, but perhaps more prized on that account, are the grinds or shoals of whales, which now and then approach the Faröe shores, numbering from a hundred to a thousand each. It is a small variety, some twenty feet in length, by half as much in girth, known as the Ca'ing whale in Orkney and in Shetland, and much more common here than further north. When it is remembered that the value of the carcases may be from three to five pounds each, and that the oil may fetch above a sovereign in cash, it is little wonder that the news of their approach rouses the Faröemen almost to frenzy. In general they are sighted by the fishermen, who form in semicircle behind them, and drive them landwards into a bay or fjord, signalling meanwhile for help. The

villages instantly are set in motion, fires are lit, that their smoke may summon further aid, knives are sharpened, and the line of boats is strengthened. Like a flock of sheep the whales are driven up the fjord, till within a few hundred yards of land, and then the foremost boats approach, harpoons, or rather lances, are raised, and from the rear are struck into the bodies. At once they rush away, and a great wave of water and of whales bursts on the shore. Among them dash the expectant villagers: some cut the monsters' necks to the bone, which the plunging animal soon breaks



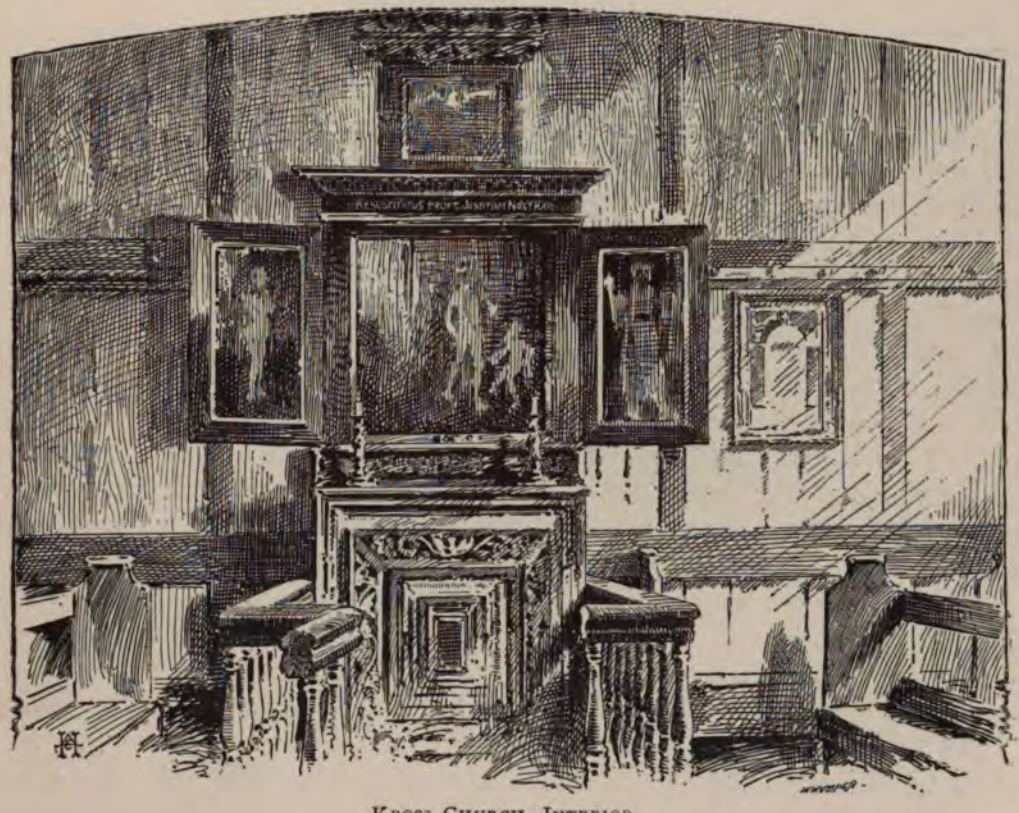
THE WHALE FISHERY IN THE FARÖE ISLANDS.

himself; others seize the blowholes of receding ones, and drag them up with hands or ropes. Meanwhile the boatmen urge the rest, or kill them in the water, which is crimsoned with their blood.

It is a ghastly scene, and the actors, with their blood-stained clothes, and hands, and faces, look more like South Sea cannibals than mild and gentle Faröese. The numbers captured vary greatly, but the yearly average exceeds a thousand. The tithe is set apart, the largest carcase goes to the crew who found the shoal, others to the poor, the officers, etc., and then the rest are shared among the dwellers in that particular neighbourhood and the men who have shared the labour of the chase. The flesh is eaten fresh or else hung up to dry. The blubber is boiled to extract the oil, or sometimes salted down; the fat is cut in strips, hung up, and used instead of bacon.



THE LÖGBERG. *See page* 120.



KROSS CHURCH, INTERIOR.

CHAPTER III.

THE EASTERN FJORDS.

AFTER leaving the Faröes, it is quite possible that events may lead us to ask, What are the wild waves doing? Sometimes they roll in mountainous piles of indigo hue, glorious and grand in their stately sweep, but treating a steamer with scant courtesy. However, it is not always so, for the passage is very fine, and the traveller may find himself 'softly sailing o'er summer seas,' even when crossing the Iceland main. Company waits on us everywhere, a cloud of gulls behind, while loons or divers disappear before.

As we advance, the days lengthen most perceptibly, and, though it is the month of August, we can read and write until within an hour of midnight. A month earlier, there is practically no night at all, the fading glow of evening is changed almost insensibly into the dawning light of day.

If the steamer leaves Thorshavn in good time in the evening, it is just possible that the first glimpse of the Iceland coast may be obtained the following night, and Reytharfjörthr, or the Whale Firth, entered in the

morning. It was so with us, and at 4 A.M., as we glided swiftly through the placid waters of the fjord, we found them dotted here and there with little native fishing-boats, whose owners perhaps had been at work all night, like the Faröemen so often are, or as certain other fishermen once were upon the Lake of Galilee. Probably some of these are Faröemen, for they come to these coasts in hundreds for the fishing season, and, to judge from the farewell signals which I saw on a certain autumn day, the relations between them and the Icelanders with whom they work and live are often very friendly. There are three or four thousand of these small boats round the coast, but only a hundred or two of the decked smacks which they ought to have. This is one of the results of old monopoly times, when foreign trade was forbidden to the Icelander. Happily these are over, and better days are coming. The effect is serious, for the fifteen thousand hands engaged secure a yearly harvest worth but about £115,000; while in 1877, four thousand five hundred Frenchmen gathered in Icelandic waters fish worth above £300,000, with only two hundred and forty-four boats, but these boats measure nearly one hundred tons; they often carry a crew of over twenty men, and have huge tanks fore and aft for the fish, which are salted as soon as caught.

At 6 A.M. we run into a smaller inlet, and anchor opposite the trading station known as Eskifjörthr. The owner of the larger warehouse, a fellow-passenger, presses us to go ashore, and sets before us chocolate and cakes with true Icelandic hospitality.

In general form and size, as well as name, Iceland is very similar to Ireland, being only one-fifth larger; nor are these the only points of likeness. The great north-western fjords have their counterpart in the bays of Cork and Kerry. The much indented north and plain unbroken south replace the similar west and east of Ireland. The central heaths and mires and deserts will stand for Irish bogs, and the eastern fjords for the coasts of Derry, Down, and Antrim. And looking north in Ireland, or east in Iceland, the relative positions of all these features are the same. But when the nature of the land is carefully examined contrast far exceeds resemblance. Here the interest rests with Iceland, a pure plutonic isle, 'a burnt out cinder,' says a hasty writer. In it one finds not one, but almost every kind of product and result of past or present igneous action. The centre, speaking generally, is a great arch of palagonite tufa, the Icelandic Móberg, rising to about two thousand feet at its centre, on the Sprengisandr. From it swell up the dome-like Jökulls and volcanoes, and through it pierce the trachyte cones that characterise this central tableland. The rock itself is heaped in shapeless masses, or laid in crumbling, clayey sandy layers, beautiful in their glowing reds, browns, and yellows. But in the wild north-western, and in the eastern fjords, this almost wholly disappears, and the great titanic walls of basalt takes its place. Here are massive staircases of trap, like those we saw in Faröe, but far exceeding them in height. This is the Icelandic

Stuthlaberg, which gives its name to a pass that leads to Faskruthsfjörthr, where another fishing station has lately been established.

In the south and central districts the natural surface of the ground is often hidden beneath a gnarled and knotted crust of lava, *Hraun* or 'Ruin' say the natives, a most expressive and appropriate name. Of such, the largest sheets and streams on earth are here. And, as if Iceland were a stage on which the widest contrasts might be set, the great volcanic piles from whose entrails these boiling floods of molten rock have been poured forth are crowned with caps and fields of ice and snow, covering one-tenth



CROSSING A LAVA BED.

of all the land. A better name for Iceland is 'The Battle-ground of Frost and Fire.'

At Eskifjörthr rises the majestic mountain Holmefjall, which Mr. Henderson calls the 'Pride of Eskifjörd,' to the height of 3378 feet. It is a fine example of a basalt pile, but not so beautiful as some whose sides have suffered more in conflict with the elements. The terraces are very narrow, and the slope is therefore very steep. In the screes, or heaps of broken stone at its feet, are many zeolites, some of whose crystal spines are several inches long. The fjord is interesting as the landing-place of Naddodr, the earliest Norse explorer, especially as the outlook of to-day is much the same as that of his. Not the least among the charms of Iceland is the slight impression that men have made upon it.

But the Icelanders are proudest of the little mine from which the famous Iceland spar may be obtained. Two or three miles east of the trading station, a little brook, the Silfurlækr, falls into the fjord, and in its bed, a few hundred feet above sea-level, occurs the cavity or vein in which this curious mineral is embedded. It is a colourless, transparent, calcareous crystal, no doubt derived by long continued action from the greenstone, in which the cavity is found. Carbonic acid, water, heat and minerals of special composition have been united in its manufacture. The spar itself is not of any special value, except for use in certain instruments of the optician, but it is highly prized by mineralogists, because its great transparency permits



A MINE OF ICELAND SPAR.

the double refraction, which it exercises in common with several other kinds of spar, to be so clearly seen. If a piece of it be laid upon a sheet of paper on which some letters have been traced, these letters will appear twice over on looking through the spar, because the rays of light in passing through are split in two.

The fjord is entirely shut in on north and west by lofty mountains, over which a difficult pass leads to the interior. An elevation of two thousand feet is attained in about three miles, and here is a vast amphi-theatre surrounded by mountain pyramids, between which are huge semi-circular chimney-like valleys. The descent from this valley is often very awkward, on account of the steepness of the snow slopes, which at this height are almost permanent.

Re-embarking, a few hours' sail to the northwards brings one round to

Seythisfjörthr, the metropolis of the east. The church and native fishing village, Dvergasteinn by name, lie on the north bank of the fjord, two or three miles below its head, where stand the trading-houses, and those rarest of all appendages, a schoolhouse and an inn—and where also are a few old cottages that house the agricultural section. Several of these were swept away by an avalanche some years ago. Lastly, on the south side of the fjord, a mile below the head, are the stations of the private merchants and the Normal company, who deal in fish.

At the head of the fjord lives the Sysselman, or sheriff, of the district, the doctor and the chemist, and half-a-dozen tradesmen, but as the wooden houses they inhabit have nothing on the outside to distinguish them, each needs a somewhat careful search. Here too, in summer, may generally be found the British Consul. A little steamer plies up and down the coast on fishing business, in which a passage to a distant fjord may be secured, or even to the Faröes. Excellent guides are also available.

Unfortunately in Iceland wines and beer and brandy are cheap, forming part of the return cargoes of the ships which carry fish to Denmark or to Spain. Traveller after traveller has written on the evil results of this custom. Too often Englishmen have readily joined, and even ministers of the Gospel who might have been expected to know better, have recorded how they too have joined their Iceland brethren in countenancing the practice. However, some of the native clergy and certain Good Templars here and there, are now engaged in working out a reformation, on the best and surest lines. I learned that in 1892 exactly fifty clergymen, including the bishop, had signed the pledge. Still that leaves seventy or eighty undecided, unaccounted for, or hostile. Of the downright drinkers, only two or three are left. Of course, the coast towns, like our own, are most at fault, and it must not be forgotten that travellers almost always see them at their worst, since the arrival and departure of the steamer leads to farewells and to greetings of a dubious nature. Said a sailor to me, 'I was at a fjord in the north when they had a kind of fête, and I didn't see a man sober for three days.' The departure of the Faröemen, though very quiet on the whole, is not without its serious or even ludicrous events, as when one sees a man hauled ignominiously on board, suspended in the canvas band intended for the ponies.

On Sunday, work of all kinds ceases, except that a few people cannot leave their little haycocks even then. The church, conspicuous in its coat of white paint, and its position on a bold rock shelf, is large and bare. Not a single window opens, and the heating of the place is carried much too far; but Icelanders are not too fond of fresh air indoors. Men only come within the chancel, men and women sit together in other parts, and children in the gallery; but in many country churches the nave is occupied by women only. It is very curious to an Englishman to see a man or woman now and then get up, calmly leave the building, and presently

return; in fact, this coming in and out continues almost all the time. Spitting is perhaps less common than in Norway, but snuff-taking adds to its unpleasantness. An American organ leads the singing, which is slow and droning, but none the less devotional, and thoroughly congregational. A gaudy red and yellow robe which the pastor wears during a portion of the Liturgy is evidently a survival of the Romanist days. His black gown and white ruff are less obtrusive and more in keeping with a Christian service.

The fjord itself is beautiful. Its massive walls of basalt are broken here and there, and on the southern side a lovely waterfall comes glancing down from the gleaming snowfields on its crest to the flower-decked screes beneath. We miss the homely daisy, which we left behind at the Faröes, but its place is taken by the mountain avens or by the parnassia. Gentians, harebells, and forget-me-nots mingle in lovely contrast with yellow bedstraws, geums, and ranunculuses, and the air is fragrant on many

'A bank where the wild thyme grows.'

In the little room at the inn hangs a card, commemorative of the restoration of the Icelandic constitution; the dates, 874 and 1874, are linked in happy union around that sweetest name for Iceland, *Eld Gamla Isafold!*—Stone old Icefield. In many a home one sees it hanging, side by side with the portrait of Jón Sigurthsson, to whose persistent eloquence the gift was greatly due. Luther's portrait too is not infrequent, but by no means so universal as in Norway.

Supper that night consisted of boiled cod, dried halibut, anchovies and sausages, whale cutlets, black and white bread, cheese and tea. The somewhat soapy-coloured whale flesh is tough, but not unpalatable. The oil has been boiled out, and the *rengi*, as they call it, is an important article of food. For any kind of travel, all writers say that ponies must be had, and this is true of any lengthy journey. But a good pedestrian might ramble on for weeks among these eastern fjords. The mountain ranges which divide them are crossed by tracks that reach a usual elevation of about two thousand feet, and the views in all directions are grand beyond description.

But we are westward bound, and must secure the means of transport. The poor unfortunate, if unprepared, who lands at Reykjavik, is told that eight or a dozen, fifteen or twenty, ponies must be had for a traveller or two, and hence the saying that Iceland is 'the most difficult and expensive country in the world to travel in;' hence, too, it comes that travellers have spent £100 a month, or even more. But this is totally unnecessary, a third of that amount, or even less, is quite sufficient. Ponies may be bought or hired. If the journey is to end where it begins, within a month, the best plan is to hire; but if the time exceeds a month, or if it ends at a

distant port, from which 'back hire' would of course be payable, the best plan is to buy. The price would range from £3 to £8, the hire is two kroner (2*s.* 3*d.*) each per day, with twice as much for the guide. Four ponies will be needed, one each for traveller, guide, and pack, and one for change, but if time enough is taken, the last may be dispensed with, especially if local guides alone are had from day to day. Now and then a fresh pony should be hired for a day, to give the others rest. For luxurious travelling a through guide is a requisite, but one loses touch with native life. For very rapid transit, of course, more change of mounts is wanted. All baggage should be packed in two stout boxes, twenty-two inches long, not more than half as wide, and fifteen high. A ring or handle must be fixed in the centre of each end, another in the centre of the lid, and a fourth at the bottom of

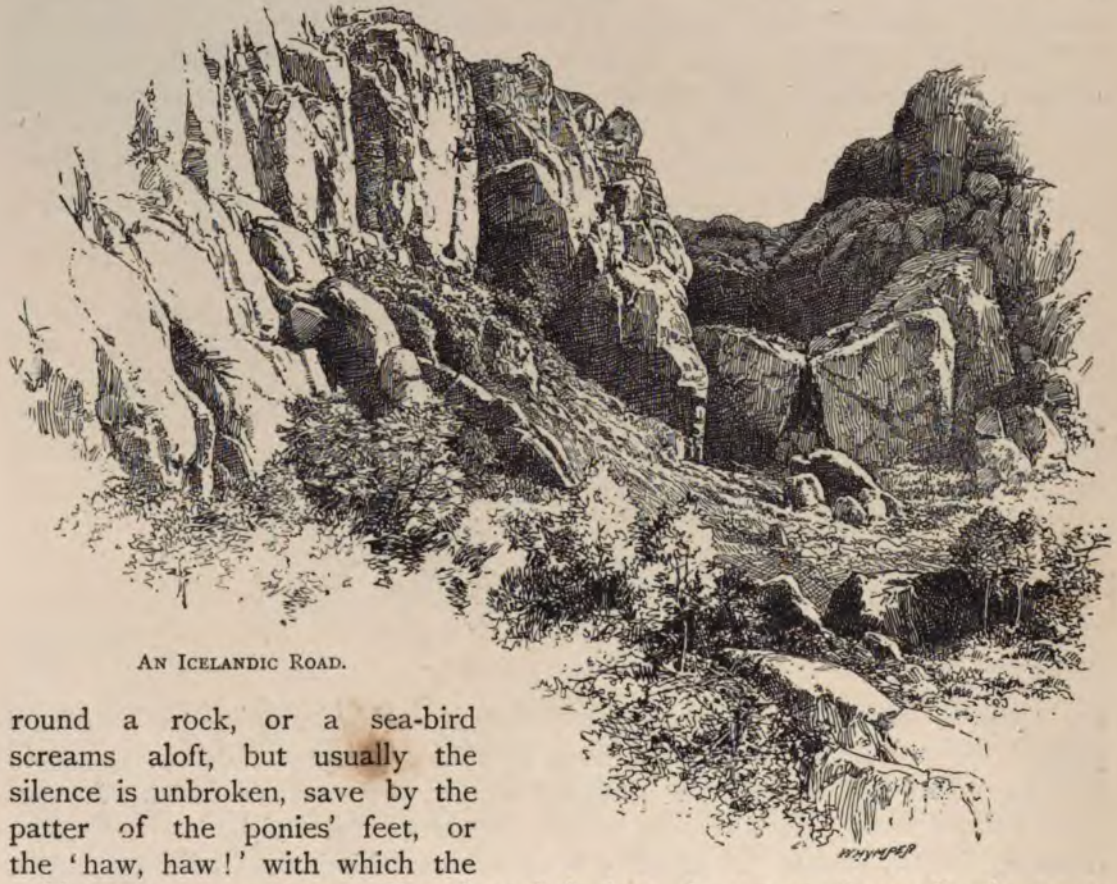


ICELANDIC PONIES.

the front. The lock should be the strongest possible, unless a hasp and padlock be preferred, but that is easily lost. The payment every night will average under half-a-crown per head for supper, bed, and breakfast. A complete suit of stout yellow oilskins should be secured at Leith, on no account omitting the sou'wester. A plaid or wrap of some kind should lie uppermost in one or other of the boxes, and with them the traveller may feel at ease. Umbrellas and macintoshes are useless.

A kind of road is being made to join the scattered thirds of Seythisfjörthr, and in the excavations several successive layers of earth and powdered pumice may be seen. The great volcanoes of the centre have sent forth clouds of the latter, which have covered all the eastern land, and, after years of restoration, the grass has grown again, decayed, and grown alternately, till a new soil has been laid down upon the pumice bed. So vast have been these showers, that the outskirts of the pumice hail have reached to Norway and the Faröes.

About an hour after leaving for the Fjartharheithi, or pass leading into the interior, there is a beautiful little waterfall known as the Fjarthará Foss. In its neighbourhood may be seen numerous excellent examples of *roches moutonées*, or rocks whose surfaces have been scored and polished by the passage over them of glaciers. The actual summit is not a single ridge, but a wild and desolate mountain upland, with here and there a black and silent tarn. On each side rise the shattered summits of the hills with 'fonds,' or beds, of snow between them. Sometimes a half-wild sheep peers



AN ICELANDIC ROAD.

round a rock, or a sea-bird screams aloft, but usually the silence is unbroken, save by the patter of the ponies' feet, or the 'haw, haw!' with which the guide encourages them. But the whole is a change so thorough, the sense of exhilaration is so keen, the air so bright and crisp, that enjoyment far outweighs depression. But when the last ridge is surmounted, suddenly there bursts upon one the vast expanse of hill and dale that lie around the valley of the Lagarfljót, with the boundless realm of space and sky above. As in Bonar's vision of the *Mingled Life*, there are

> 'Bits of gladness and of sorrow,
> Strangely crossed and interlaid;
> Bits of cloudbelt and of rainbow,
> In deep alternate braid;

Bits of storm when winds are warring,
Bits of calm when blasts are stayed;
Bits of silence and of uproar,
Bits of sunlight and of shade!'

This valley is the richest in Eastern Iceland. It contains ten parishes, whose farms possess extensive meadows and abundant pasturage. The mountain slopes abound in *fjallagros*, or Iceland moss, the sovereign remedy of the north for bronchial troubles. The search for this useful lichen forms the annual holiday of Icelandic girlhood. Little tents are pitched among



ICELANDIC FARM BUILDINGS.

the mountains, and many a merry party gathers from the lowland farms. The streams abound in fish, and access to the sea is easy, though the sand bar at the river's mouth prevents the steamers from approaching. Like almost all the great Icelandic rivers, the Lagarfljót is a turbid glacier stream, and its light-grey waters are heavily laden with the débris from the grinding ice-sheets of the Vatna Jökull. In the reach beneath us now, some thirty miles in length, its breadth expands to a mile or more at intervals, and it reminds one of the Mawddach Estuary as seen from the hills near Barmouth Bridge.

Besides the smaller farms are the larger homesteads of Eythar, of whose elegance and expansive 'reckonings' Lock makes mention; Ketilstathr, with its neat guest-chamber, whose walls are paper-panelled, with gilt

mouldings and painted borders round the panels, where we stayed for the night; and Egilstathr, where, in later days, I also stayed, and found a dish of wild flowers on the table at supper time. In each the 'reckonings' were anything but 'expansive.' At the head of the Lagarfljót stands Hallormstathr, famous for its *Skogar*, or wood. It certainly must be confessed that the general treelessness of Iceland is apt to make the landscapes bare and bleak, but while so many travellers have dwelt on this, it quite refreshes one to read in Paijkull's appreciative book: 'Wherever one turns the eye one finds an ample compensation, and the impression which the mind receives is, "I do not miss the forests." The thought of the non-appearance of wood and forests is pushed into the background by the magnificent scale on which Nature has revealed herself.' But here is a real birch wood, perhaps the best in Iceland, the trees reach twenty feet in height, and are numerous enough to give the farmers a supply of fuel that can scarcely be found elsewhere. A few miles further west is the splendid Hengifoss, or Hanging Force, supposed to be the loftiest cataract in Iceland. Burton says, 'it plunges suddenly into a huge cauldron, the Hengifossárgil, and is dashed to drops before it reaches the Kieve, which is considered to lie 1200 feet below.' At Valpjófstathr begins the reindeer country. I heard of a party who brought back ten as the result of an expedition into the Snæfell district in 1891, and the herds are said to number several hundreds.

North-westward lies another turbid torrent, the Jökulsá á brú, or Glacier River with the bridge. There is a wooden bridge thirty miles lower down, but the primitive contrivance from which the river takes its name is here, on the highway to the north. Mr. Holland thus describes it:—'It consists merely of a wooden box, only just sufficiently large to carry a man and an ordinary horse burden (that is, about 2 feet wide, 2 feet 6 inches long, and 2 feet high), suspended above the stream by means of two ropes, which run at each side of it, through holes in upright posts placed in its corners. The ends of these ropes are secured on each shore to beams of wood, which are kept in place by a number of heavy stones heaped up round them. A third rope is fastened to each end of the box, so as to admit of its being drawn backwards and forwards by a person on either side of the river. We found the *klafr* fastened to the beam on the far shore, and all our attempts to haul it across to our side proved unsuccessful. Here was a dilemma, we were left with our baggage on one bank of the river, and our horses were on the other, but there appeared no way of getting across it ourselves; the farm was too far off for us to make the people hear, and every minute it was growing darker and darker. At length our *fylgdarmadr* hit upon a plan to get us out of our difficulty; by getting astride upon both ropes, and working himself on by his hands, he managed with a good deal of difficulty to reach the far shore. There he unfastened the *klafr*, and we drew it across, and getting into it one at a time with a load

of baggage, all crossed the river in turn. The *klafr* is not a very pleasant sort of bridge. Owing to the slackness of the ropes, the box slides down rapidly till it comes over the middle of the stream; there it stops with a sudden jerk, quite enough to throw a person who is unprepared for it overboard into the angry, curdling waters beneath.'

The north road leads past Möthrudalr (Madderdales), the fairest farm in Iceland, by all accounts. Many a traveller has dwelt upon the comforts of the home, its owner's fleecy wealth, and the most unusual excellence of the paths around it.

A dozen miles to the west is one of the most curious mountains in the island, the great volcano Herthubreith, the 'Broad-shouldered.' Mr. Holland says: 'This noble mountain rises from amongst a bevy of small hills that are grouped around its base, in the middle of an extensive flat plain, to the height of more than 5500 feet. Its appearance is very singular. Its lower part appears to be cylindrical, and for a long way up its sides are nearly vertical precipices of rock. These are surmounted by a squat cone of perennial ice and snow. A snow-capped mountain has often been compared to a cake coated with sugar, but in no case could this simile be nearer the truth than in its application to Herthubreith.'

Through the Lagarfljót valley pass all the tracks of East Icelandic intercourse. North-eastward lies the road to Vopnafjörthr, place of export for Icelandic mutton, where may be seen, according to Paijkull, a columnar wall of basalt 200 feet in height, at the base of which are several little 'Fingal's Caves.' On the way one might pass the church of Hof, with its wonderful old door, which, Henderson says, is reported by a tradition that may be traced upwards of four hundred years back, to be the identical door that led into the heathen 'temple,' from which the place is named.

But our own road leads to the south towards Thingmúli. The plain is only just recovering from the fearful pumice storm, of which we saw some traces at Seythisfjörthr. Réclus estimates the total quantity ejected then at 400,000,000 cubic yards! I dined at Thingmúli with the friendly pastor, who hardly cared to trust his English speech, but conversed quite cleverly on paper. Discussing the well-known perils of the southern coast, he wrote, "You moust have *one* god horse to go over the horrible rivers.' Poor fellow! how little either of us foresaw that, while I should pass those rivers safely, he would find a watery grave but two months later in the Grím-sá, a river flowing just a stone's-throw from his door. Yet this news met me when I returned to Iceland the following summer, on which occasion we had his son as guide one day. He told us how he was quartered at Vallanes, and his mother and his sisters with another farmer some distance up the valley. I said how much I should like to see them, and so we went together. An arrangement such as this is usual in Iceland in any case of need, and, though official, is an excellent plan. There must

be many a home in England whose empty rooms might welcome some bereaved one, who would bring a greater blessing than that received. 'Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these My brethren, ye have done it unto Me.'

I bought a farmer's pony from the pastor, and he added a fine black sheepskin, which, folded over the saddle, made easier work of many a long



VALLANES CHURCH, WITH AN ANCIENT CARVING OF THE SAVIOUR.

day's ride. Flowers abound on every hand; those of Seydisfjörthr and many others, campion and catchfly, avens and asphodel, meadow rose, and meadow rue. We are now on the borderland of basalt, and the volcanic centre.

The Skrithdalr, or Slipping dale, which narrows in before us, contains a line of landslip and of cones. The colour contrasts on the slopes are very fine. On the dark-grey, protruding basalt buttresses rest piles of burnt sienna, or buff and ochreous, palagonite and trachyte, changing sometimes to greens of sulphurous tone; while above all is a crown of pure white snow. Some of these slopes are of fragile stuff, of which great beds have formed beneath, and through these the torrents have torn great gaping *gils*, wherein the varied colours meet, and out of which stand ribs of

sterner stuff, like reefs in a foaming sea. Breithdalsheithi, which we have to cross, is a regular mountain pass, over 2000 feet in height. So rough is the way among the numberless boulders which strew the top, that even Icelanders have been obliged to pile the stones together into a kind of causeway. Here and there a pyramid of blocks has been erected to mark the way in winter, when every trace of path has disappeared beneath the snow. Kerlíng or Vartha is the native name. The descent into Breithdal is superb. The track is often scarcely wide enough for more than the pony's feet, and as one nears the foot the turrets, piles, and ramparts on the left are grand in the extreme. Sometimes they look like castle towers, till one sees a pendent waterfall between them.

It was late that night when we reached the farm of Hóskuldstathr. Every one had gone to bed, but Gisli soon aroused them. Out came two women, as bright and cheerful as if it were not midnight. Through a kind of tunnel, common to most Icelandic houses, we were guided to the little guest-chamber. Supper was soon produced, and followed, at nearly one o'clock, by coffee, hot and fragrant! Under the grass roof of that homely building were photographs in frames and albums, books and pictures, reminding one that the civilisation of a household may not be measured by the aspect of its shell. Many a handsome golden brooch and chain, the work of skilful hands in careful training, might have been found within the wattle walls of Irish chieftains, a thousand years ago.

A jug of milk was placed beside me, and at half-past six the following morning coffee came again. This is the general custom, and very pleasant is the matutinal cup, with its dish of Kleinur cakes or biscuits. The eldest daughter of the homestead often is the bearer, and not unfrequently she carries off such clothes as seem to want a brush. For breakfast a kind of Irish stew appeared, both hot and cold, smoked mutton, bread and cheese, with milk and pancakes, followed once more by coffee as a stirrup cup. Icelandic coffee is renowned, and justly so, for the roasting and the grinding of the berries just before the making brings all the rich aroma into the coffee-pot; and the cream is fresh and thick. Payment was declined on this occasion, and the stuffing of a faulty saddle thrown into the bargain. Since then I find the house is being partly reconstructed, Norway pine replacing stones and turf. Breakfast is the great meal in Iceland, so much so that its native name is *Dagmál*—the day meal. Midday dinner is unknown, except at some of the trading towns, though a bowl of milk is offered everywhere between times.

Striking westwards a zigzag path winds up the sharp ascent of Bitruháls. Burton says of this: 'Nowhere does Iceland show more colouring. The red, pink, dead-white and pale-green palagonite follows the torrent beds and girths the rivers; and the singularity is increased by walls and outcrops of the hardest and blackest hornblende, building dykes, bridging

chasms, and causing the snow streams to breach over in cascades.' The pass is very steep, and for nearly two hours we and our clever little ponies plodded up, but once upon the summit, all fatigue was soon forgotten in the glorious view beyond. An Iceland fjord is never seen to more advantage than from above, and there, two thousand feet beneath us, lay the blue waters of lovely Berufjörthr, sparkling in the sunshine. Along the farther shore are pretty bays with firm black sands, and narrow, bright-green borderlands, above which rise the ponderous, frowning basalt battlements and bastions of a noble mountain range, whose summits soar aloft above three thousand feet; beyond which, further west, are the glittering snowfields of the Thrándar Jökull, ethereal in their virgin purity and dazzling brilliancy. The words of Bonar well befit them—

'The sun is on your heights! and from these cliffs
It speaks to us of love and glory there,
Like some fresh joyous angel that alights
To call us upward to the good and fair.

It says the better Sun is just at hand,
And with Him all true dayspring. O Great Sun,
Sun of all earth and heaven, ascend and shine,
And let this darkness pass, this night be done.'

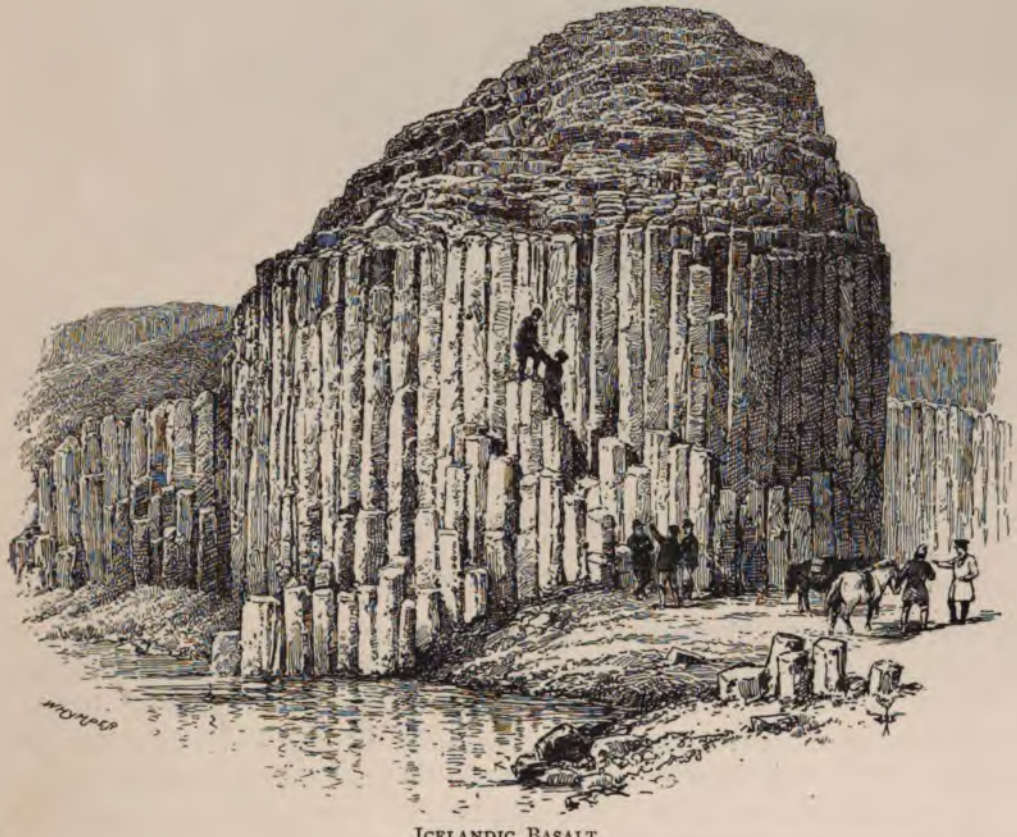
On our own side the splintered pinnacles of the Berufjarthartindar form a line of curious shapes and forms. In many cases the nucleus in the basalt mass alone remains, like a lofty pillar on a mountain top. Sometimes these pillars look like monuments or cairns, and it is difficult to believe that they are natural.

The pathway to the fjord is strewn with broken zeolites, bits of agate, and fragments of chalcedony. On the left there yawns a fearful chasm, the Sotabotn; at the bottom is a lonely church and parsonage.

The richest hunting-ground, however, for the minerals just referred to is nearer Djúpivogr, by a little farm called Teigarhorn. Here, says Paijkull, they may be found in a stratum of 'amygdaloidal' basalt, so called from the 'almond-shaped' cavities it contains. Within the cavities lie the zeolites in beds of reddish clay. When one adds that beyond the beds of sea-weeds eider ducks of brown and homely plumage may be seen, with their broods of fluffy little ducklings, and now and then, perhaps, a group of seals, enough will have been said to show the vast variety of the 'Bearfirth' interests.

At Djúpivogr most comfortable quarters may be had with an Icelandic merchant, whose cultivated tastes and constant kindness make one loth to leave his hospitable roof. The carpets, easy-chairs, and excellent harmonium, the plentiful repasts, and converse of a man fully abreast of European doings, almost tempted to a stay as long as the orthodox three days of the

viking times. The neighbourhood is famous for its so-called 'Giants' Walls.' These are great walls of basalt, the remains of dykes, apparently piercing some soft stratum, which has afterwards been washed away. Here the traveller may easily imagine himself among the ruins of old castles, with courtyard walls around him.



ICELANDIC BASALT.



APPROACHING THE SUMMIT OF THE ÖRALFA JÖKULL.

CHAPTER IV.

THE ICE MOUNTAINS OF THE SOUTH.

HOWEVER grand we may consider the mountains of the East, they must of necessity yield in glory to the stupendous ice-clad masses of the South. Here the outbursts of volcanic energy have occurred in closest contact with the no less marvellous phenomena displayed in the realm of the Ice King. It is here that frost and fire have grappled in sternest conflict.

The travellers who have penetrated into its recesses have been few and far between, but their testimonies are significantly similar. Some, who have written big books on Iceland, advanced upon it with great expectations, but ended by leaving it severely alone. Its dominating features are, firstly, the Great Vatna Jökull, or Water Glacier, sometimes called the Klofa, or Cleft, Jökull, crossed by Mr. Watts, in one direction, in 1875; and secondly, the Öræfa Jökull, the loftiest peak in Iceland, whose summit was first reached by the author in 1891. The Vatna Jökull covers nearly two thousand square miles, and from its western extremity, known as the Skaptarjökull, has proceeded the largest stream of lava known to have been ejected at one eruption.

The term *Jökull* is applied by the Icelanders both to true glaciers and to mountains plus the glaciers upon them, although the former are sometimes distinguished by the term *Skrithjöklar*, or slipping glaciers. It is derived from *Jaki*, a fragment of ice. A corresponding word in Anglo-Saxon is,

gicel, from which we obtain 'icicle.' Probably the Swiss *Jöch* comes from the same root.

From the Vatna, two enormous ice-streams, the Breithamerkr or Broadmark, and the Skeitharar or Swift-river, descend to sea-level, embracing the Öræfa within their icy grasp, and from each proceeds a river, justly described by the unfortunate pastor of Thingmuli as 'horrible.' For two hundred and fifty miles, from Djúpivogr to Eyrarbakki, there is not a single harbour in which a steamer may find a shelter; nor dare even a trading-sloop approach the coast in the interval of one hundred and fifty miles between Papós and Vík. This is due to the enormous quantities of sand and débris brought down by the glacier-rivers, and flung back by the sea in an ever-increasing series of dangerous banks and shallows. In the latter interval, this series is only interrupted by two isolated rocky headlands. In several cases these banks assume the form of reefs running parallel with the shore, and enclosing lagoons, which are often as placid as the ocean outside is turbulent. Lónsvik, the Still Bay, derives its name from this circumstance, although the term ought, strictly speaking, to be confined to the two creeks within the reef, the more westerly of which is Papa Fjörthr.

After leaving Djúpivogr, the track winds round the shores of Hamarsfjörthr and Alftafjörthr where the rugged precipices we have become accustomed to are replaced by green and terraced slopes. The point between them takes its name, Melrakkanes, from the native name for the fox, one of the very few indigenous animals of Iceland. There are two kinds, the white and the blue. They probably came from Greenland originally, in the same way as the white bears do now—that is, on the slabs of ice which every year break off from the Greenland pack, and beset the Iceland coast on the north and east.

Here it is often necessary to ride into the sea in order to double the little projecting tongues of rock, over which the climb would be tedious. The ponies are ready enough to take advantage of the opportunity to secure a good draught of sea-water, which, says Gisli, is good for them. West of these fjords comes a wild mountain pass, Lónsheithi, remarkable for its fine basaltic columns. They occur at each end of the pass, in both cases on the northern side; those at the western extremity are near the summit, and are very interesting, since they form the lower part of a huge rock, whose upper portion is a rough and shapeless mass of ancient basaltic lava. The plain beneath is watered, or indeed often deluged, as the enormous stone and shingle beds show, by the Jökulsá-i-Lón, whose turbid waters are rolling oceanwards the débris of the eastern Hofs Glacier. The current is very rapid, and as our ponies enter the stream the intelligent animals lean their weight against the flood, which swirls angrily between their legs, or breaks in wavelets over their shoulders. Owing to the rapidity of the flow, it appears, on looking down, as if the horse were making no progress forward, but taking instead great sidelong strides up stream. On looking at the

further bank, however, it is manifest, on the contrary, that the force of the current is really bearing him rapidly down stream. This like most of the southern rivers, has many channels, and in the worst of them our guide leads the way diagonally against the current, which the pony's shoulders divide like the prow of a boat.

On emerging from the stream we have before us the last of the hill ranges we shall have to surmount. It ends in the extremely beautiful Vestrahorn, a mountain having three sharp peaks, of which the two outermost almost appear to lean towards the central. Beneath it nestles Papós, with its merchant's house and store, the last for one hundred and fifty miles. The pass is known as the Almannaskarth, or Allmens Gap, and the view from its summit is among the finest in Iceland. There can be no doubt whatever that the direction in which we are travelling is that in which the scenery presents itself in most striking aspects. As we rounded the corner of the last spur, on a later visit, we suddenly exchanged the homely foreground of brown rock for a glorious sweep of sunlit sea, right across which, fifty-two miles away, westward ho! rose in virgin beauty the snow-clad ridge of the Öræfa. The coast between was fringed with enormous glaciers, separated by rugged mountain peaks, like islets amid the sea of ice. Of this spot Henderson says—

'The whole of the scenery was calculated to produce in the mind the noblest and most sublime emotions. How vast and glorious are the works of God! How they reflect the splendour, majesty, and unlimited perfection of their Maker! But if such be the grandeur and beauty of creation; if the eye be dazzled with its lustre, and the most capacious mind be unable to grasp its immensity, how infinitely more excellent and glorious must He be, to whose all-creative word they owe their existence!' Henderson was a most observant traveller, and the key-note of this passage is precisely that of the scene itself—its vastness. The path to the pastures of Bjarnanes is a mere scratch down the crumbling screes of the mountain side, but once at the bottom a pleasant canter brings one to the parsonage. Here, on my first visit, I was most hospitably entertained, and led off to tea, or rather chocolate and coffee, by the doctor of the district. For the run to his home at Borgum, he lent me his own horse, an animal whose manifest pleasure in flying over the broken grass land and intersecting watercourses, with a delightfully easy ambling motion, by no means universal, clearly showed the difference between the ponies which the Icelanders sell, and those which they keep for their own use.

But doctors here may well have good mounts. The districts of which each is the salaried guardian are often very large. That of the pony's owner is *ninety miles* in length, and though the last fifteen to the west is an uninhabited desert, a visit to a patient at Skaptafell entails a ride of one hundred and forty miles.

On leaving Bjarnanes, my guide led off in a westerly direction towards a large sheet of water, which on the map appears to be an arm of the sea. We went not only towards, but actually straight into the water. I soon perceived that in reality it is a river, the Hornafljót, three miles wide, flowing at an inconsiderable speed from the vast ice-fields of the Heinabergs Glacier. Its waters are thickly charged with a whitish mud. Its depth rarely exceeds a yard, the average would not amount to half as much, especially as here and there we came to banks which appeared above the surface. The general direction through this waste of waters is marked by a line of posts driven into the river's bed; and how necessary they are



CROSSING AN ICELANDIC RIVER.

became strikingly evident when a heavy fog settled down upon us, and we experienced the strange and peculiar sensation of riding through these waters entirely out of sight of land, with nothing to direct us but the shadowy outline of a distant post. To add to the uncanniness of the situation, our horses occasionally floundered into a quicksand, stirring up a cloud of black mud, if such an expression is permissible. Fortunately, however, these were never deep, and an Icelandic pony may be trusted to keep his feet, if any animal on earth can do so. The whole was, undoubtedly, a novel experience, but in Iceland the unexpected is of frequent occurrence.

The passage occupied an hour, and on leaving the river we found ourselves among some dismal marshes. Away to the north lie the columnar rocks of Rauthaberg, of which Henderson says: 'I almost fancied myself

amid the ruins of some of the noblest structures of ancient Greek art. The pillars were piled one above another with the most perfect exactness, and arranged so as to make a perfect semicircle. They stand quite perpendicularly; the divisions may be about four feet in length, but in general they appear to be from two to three. Most of them were six-sided; a considerable number had five, and some seven sides.' On reaching the end of the marshes the track leads up to the base of a grand cliff, the Hestgerthisnukr, in which a very fine effect is produced by the superposition of a kind of extremely black agglomerate upon a rich, warm, red basalt. On turning the corner a beautiful valley opens out before one, in which nestle the half-dozen farms that form the village of Borgarhöfn.

At Kálfafellstathr is a small church, remarkable, even in this land of wonders, for being chained down by four great iron cables which are attached to the corners of the



THE CHAINED CHURCH.

building, just underneath the roof. I asked a native, later, what these were for. 'Oh,' said he, 'the old church was blown away, and so they chained the new one down, to keep it in its place.' The chains looked wonderfully like ship's cables, and raised a grim suspicion as to what else the wind had done. It is the Icelander's continual foe. It kills his trees; it furrows up his pasture-land, and bores into the hummocks that result, until it sweeps their tops away, and leaves innumerable cups of turfless peat; it undermines the hillsides, until great overhanging cornices are left, from which the grass roots hang like cobwebs, until these too collapse; it even drills its way into the softer rocks, and issues as a sand-blast from the cavelets which it forms; it aggravates the cold of winter, and forms its greatest ordinary danger, for if a man be shelterless upon the fells in an Icelandic

blizzard, it seals his fate, and men explain the end by simply saying, 'He was out!' Apart from this the winters have been greatly over-rated, for the snow is not of extraordinary depth upon the lowlands, and often thaws between the storms.

After passing under the beetling crags of Breithabólstathrfjall, from which numbers of enormous boulders have fallen upon the track, we arrived at Reynivellir, or Rowanfields, beautiful in its treasures of flower and rock and waterfall, though the Rowans from which the name is derived are represented now by only one or two small specimens, clinging to the side of a little *gil*. But the clover, thyme, and meadow-sweet unite to make the banks as fragrant as the buttercups, forget-me-nots, and harebells make them bright. Westward rose the grandest mountain mass in Iceland, the mighty Öræfa, with its vast snow-fields and huge, cascade-like glaciers gleaming in the evening light. Here I stayed till Monday, and on Sunday morning wandered towards the little waterfall behind the house, and was most interested in seeing how manifestly my hosts, two brothers, considered personal attendance to be their bounden duty. I plucked a flower, and speedily they brought a bunch. I touched a stone, and half-a-dozen were at once forthcoming. However, I let them see that this was quite unnecessary, and found a corner for a quiet hour. My reading fell within the Book of Job, and its pregnant words about the sea and earth, the rain and ice, came with redoubled force and life-likeness amid those grand surroundings, where, indeed, 'He bindeth up the waters,' and 'spreadeth out the heavens'; 'He shaketh the earth out of her place,' 'removeth the mountains,' and 'overturneth them in His anger.'

In the evening all the household came into the little guest-chamber, *Psálmabóks* were obtained, and several evidently well-known hymns were sung. The tunes are somewhat dreary to an English ear, but the reverence of the singing was very manifest. Some of the old world customs of the Icelanders—the thanksgiving for the crossing of a river, for instance, of Henderson's day—unfortunately have become almost extinct, but underneath the surface of reserve is often to be found a deep and true Christian life. This is especially the case, as an Iceland pastor told me, among 'the poorer class,' and there it will be found with many, 'if you can lift the cover.' Of its existence I was destined very soon to have a proof. During the afternoon the tenant of the next farm had come in, presumably to see the Englishman, a somewhat rare phenomenon in these parts, and, as the sequel proved, to show his sympathy with my desire for Sabbath rest whenever it could be obtained. At nightfall a letter arrived from him, addressed, 'To the Englishman.' Around the small guest-chamber were ranged, in true Icelandic style, the boxes wherein were stored the treasures of the inmates, boxes which served as chairs by day. One of the girls of our household produced, from the depths of her box, a phrase-book, by the aid of which I gained a fair idea

of the writer's meaning, but I will give a version kindly made for me by an Icelandic friend.

REYNIVELLIR, *August* 10, 1890.

DEAR SERVANT OF GOD,—

It gladdened my heart that you did not continue your travelling this our Lord's blessed day, because I wished to praise my God in quiet peace. The 11th of August I shall go to the glacier, trusting to God to make a passage at least for the luggage you want with you. I am sure that the kind soul I observed through the light of your eye will pray to God for me, that I may get through it.

God's peace be with you,
EYJÓLFUR RUNOLFSSON.

Faith, hope, and love, a grand alliance here, and a spark of the old Icelandic grace, an echo of the skald, to close with.

The farm was of the usual type, half-a-dozen gables, wood fronted, grass roofed, one for porch and one for guest-room, with the tunnel for a passage, one for stores and one for kitchen, here the smithy, there the dairy; over the store-room lies the Bath-stofa, to which I get a hearty welcome. On each side runs a line of bedsteads, heads and tails throughout, while at the end a ponderous loom awaits the contributions of a little crowd of spinning wheels. One of these is set in motion, and the household gathers round, as gratified at the interest I am taking as I at their friendliness. They also played their national hymn to the tune of 'God save the Queen,' though in anything but inspiring time. Nowhere in the house is there a fireplace, except in the kitchen. Perhaps nothing strikes a stranger as more remarkable; but in the family room the crowd supplies the warmth by day, and the two great beds of eider down which form the couch, by night. Nor would a fire be possible, for its fumes of dried sheep's dung or clouds of peat smoke fill the building where it burns. In large houses, here and there, stoves are being introduced, especially near the trading stations, but coal is precious at these distant homesteads. The



INTERIOR OF A FARMHOUSE BEDROOM.

little that the forge requires is brought on pony-back from Papós, forty miles away, and the men from Skaptafell must travel twice as far and then return.

In the store-room hang long strips of sealskin, with which they bind their hay in bundles, for conveyance to the little huts in which they keep it; while in the porch are sheets of spiny, prickly shark-skin, for shoes. The flesh itself hangs in long shreds under an open roof, that the wind may drive away the stench and make it fit for food some months hence, when hard and dry. But tastier looks the stockfish, which I saw being prepared. A piece is laid upon a block and hammered with a smithy sledge, until its fibres separate, while a dog or two, half Esquimaux, half colley, stand around to catch the fragments which fly from underneath the hammer.

The outlook seaward is dismal to the last degree; low, stormy, sandy stretches of dark comminglings of land and water, with breakers foaming on the shoals far out, reveal the dangerous nature of the coast, and the frequency of wreck-wood in the farmsteads accentuates the lesson. Frenchmen seem to suffer most, and their *merci*, as an equivalent for the solid Iceland *thakk*, was a source of great amusement to my hosts. They dwelt on it with artless glee, quite innocent of suggestion that the *merci* was the outcome of what, perchance, was kindness shown by them to some poor shipwrecked mariner.

In olden days a fertile plain lay to the east of the Öræfa. Tradition says that Hrollaug, nephew of Rollo, William the Conqueror's ancestor, lived here. His name remains in certain little rocky islets, a few miles off the coast, the Hrollaugseyjar; but in the fourteenth century his descendants were driven from the Breithamerkr, or Broadmarch, by a burst of ice and water from the Vatna slopes, and their woods and meadows disappeared beneath the glacier which has now usurped the place and name. In the middle of the eighteenth century five miles of sand and stones remained between its front and the ocean's brink; but when Henderson crossed the sands in 1818, one mile only was left. At that it stands to-day, and the gigantic icefield, from eight and a half to fourteen miles in width, and reaching back until its total area approaches two hundred square miles, remains quiescent as a whole, though of course in constant motion as regards its particles. The waters of its upper portions flow down the moulins and crevasses which pierce it, until they reach a vast sub-glacial tunnel, from which they issue in a mad and boiling torrent named the Jökulsá.

As my guide and I approached, we passed four horses riderless. A glance at the swirling waves of thick grey water turned us quickly back to where we saw four men descending from the glacier. Eyjólfur had fulfilled his pledge. How long he and his men had laboured there I know not, but the fruit of their work was manifest in holes which they had hacked with a great wood axe. Speedily my own ice axes were produced, and a pathway

made among the pyramids and pinnacles of ice. The actual crossing of the river was over a huge ice slab, which formed a natural bridge, but the approach thereto cost hours of labour, for the horses slipped among the seracs, and once a pony fell into a small crevasse, until his body jammed between its lips. However, he was soon pulled out, happily none the worse except for a scratch or two, and sadly shaken nerves. Meanwhile the rain poured steadily down and added to the men's discomfort, yet, when the whole was over, the ponies loaded up again, and the question of the cost



ONE OF THE GLACIERS DESCENDING FROM THE ORÆFA JÖKULL.

proposed, it was met by an absolute refusal. Neither for himself, nor even for his men, would Eyjólfur accept a farthing. Little wonder that a native parting was ours that day, though the kiss of an Iceland farewell was that of brothers in addition.

This blackened, sand-stained front is but the funeral pall of the disappearing glacier. Beyond are miles of crystal ice, with a pure white surface of granulated snow, from which stand out innumerable cones from one to ten or a dozen feet in height, preserved by the sand coat to which indeed they owe their origin. On a later visit I discovered that the medial moraine is a range of ice hills a hundred feet in height, bearing its load of sand and stones, from certain peaks upon the Vatna Jökull, which are not

marked upon the usual map. For the last ten miles of its course its average fall amounts to about one hundred and twenty feet per mile.

The Öræfa Jökull claims more than a passing notice. It is a huge mountain ridge, fourteen or fifteen miles in length, and over twelve in width. Its northern spurs are rooted in the mass of the Vatna Jökull, and its southern extremity is washed by the waves of the North Atlantic, from the level of which it rises directly to its full height of 6400 feet. About 2000 feet above sea-level begins the ice sheet, which covers the whole mass, except where a few black peaks emerge from the crystal shroud. A cordon of rugged fells surrounds the monarch like a guard of honour, between which eight or nine great glaciers descend almost to the level of the sea. Some of these fill nameless valleys on the east, where they join the ice flood of the Breithamerkr; others, on the south, hang down the gorges and ravines like cataracts arrested in their course by some magician's wand, while longer ice-streams sweep round the western ridges. Beneath these ridges the land was fair and fruitful, like the eastern valley, and in 1341 it is said that forty fertile farms surrounded the little church at Sandfell, when suddenly the dormant forces of the mountain woke. Under the influence of volcanic heat, and probably too of bursts of boiling water, the snow-fields liquefied, and farms and flocks were swept into the sea to help to make the sandbanks, one hundred and eighty feet in thickness, where ocean waves had rolled before. In 1598 another outbreak followed, and a final devastation in 1727, of which the Sandfell pastor, Sira Jón Thorláksson, has left a record.

He tells us how, while engaged at service on Sunday, August 7, 1727, the earth began to tremble and the building seemed to bend together. On the 8th an earthquake followed, and terrible reports like claps of thunder. Then came floods of boiling water, and the ice itself, loosened by the heat, slid down upon the plain, so as almost to hide the mountain Lómagnúpr (2529 feet high). Then stones and ashes fell so thickly that one could scarce distinguish night from day, while gleams of light appeared from fissures on the mountain. The people sheltered under rocks, or went about with buckets on their heads, to shield them from the red-hot stones. On the 11th a fresh deluge of hot water descended, to escape which two women and a boy took refuge on a house-roof, but the house as well was swept away. In all 600 sheep, 160 horses, and 7 people perished, and food remained for but one-fifth of the cows. The glow continued on the mountain throughout the winter, until the following April, when the pastor visited the fissures, and overturned a rock into a large one, but could not hear it strike the bottom. Metcalfe speaks of an eruption in 1861, but this appears to have been a glacier *hlaup*, or ordinary waterburst, and to have taken place upon the Skeitharar or Skapta Glacier. Of Sandfell nothing but the church and parsonage remains. Southwards from it, as far as Hof, great

piles and terraces of stones, whirled into circlets, banks, and huge chaotic wastes, bear eloquent though silent witness to the devastation of the past.

An attempt to reach the summit of the Öræfa was made by Herra Pálsson in 1794, from Kvisker, and he attained the highest portion of the snowfield, but left untouched the 'Peaks,' which he considered 'for the most part inaccessible, as a single false step would inevitably precipitate the traveller into the unfathomable chasms at their base.' In 1861 Mr. Holland and Mr. Shepherd made another attempt from Knappavellir, but were stopped at the foot of some 'perpendicular cliffs which form the side of the Knappr,' where Mr. Holland says he found that 'it was quite impossible to climb higher, owing to the very loose and broken state of the laminated shelves.' 'A system of wide crevasses in the broken snow' prevented him from trying to coast round the rocks. Such was the position of affairs when I reached Sandfell on August 11, 1890, and became the guest of the hospitable pastor, who, with his amiable wife, did everything he could to make me comfortable and to further my endeavours. Unfortunately he could tell me little of the mountain mass behind us. It was arranged, however, that help should be obtained, if possible, from Svinafell. After supper my host led the way into a little bedroom as bright and clean and homelike, with its snowy sheets and crimson curtains, as some Icelandic resting-places are unpleasant. Indeed, a tin of insect powder had sometimes been of signal service, and should form a part of every traveller's equipment.

The morning of the 12th was fine, too fine, as the sequel showed. Eighty-six miles distant, W.S.W., shone in the morning light the snowfields of the Myrdals Jökull. Behind the farm are beetling tufa cliffs, with pumice beds beneath them, and while examining these I saw the pastor and his wife approach. 'There come three men from Svinafell,' said he, pointing to some little specks among the stone wastes. With these, Páll Jonsson, Thorlakur Thorlaksson, and Jón Sigurthsson, the ascent commenced, at four o'clock, in fog and rain. Between the ridge of Sandfell and that of Svinafell lies a mighty glacier known as the Virkis Jökull, occupying the whole of the Hvannadal. This is terribly crevassed on its eastern side, but crossing it by compass in a N.E. direction we struck a tongue of rock at nine o'clock, and camped beneath a slightly overhanging rock. Across the valley, for a while, we heard the roar of avalanches, and the heavy boom of falling snow from a glacier, whose course was interrupted by a precipice, down which the masses fell to join the Jökull we had crossed.

Next morning we reached the summit of the ridge uniting Svinafell to the main mass of the Öræfa, and as we did so a glorious sight revealed itself. We stood upon a precipice brink; and a thousand feet beneath us there flowed a stately glacier, north-west and west, behind the ridge of Svinafell, in a curve of exquisite beauty, its surface one successive series of ice-waves and crevasses in orderly unbroken sequence. Mr. Holland saw the

foot of it far away at Svinafell, and compared it to 'a flowing sea,' 'with rolling waves arrested suddenly.' Its general appearance closely resembles that of the Aletch Glacier, with its curve reversed. At ten o'clock we reached the summit of the mountain's northern peak, and plunging through the névé, sought to gain the central peak, but storm and snow increased incessantly. By half-past one we gained the head of the snow-slopes, but two of us were levelled by the wind at once, and it was evident that an attempt to gain the actual ridge would be but madness. At half-past ten we were safely back at Sandfell.

At midnight on August 15, 1891, I once more reached the familiar



THE PARTY WHICH MADE THE FIRST SUCCESSFUL ASCENT OF THE ÖRÆFA JÖKULL.

homestead with Mr. Coulthard. At four on the morning of the 17th, my friends from Svinafell were ready, all eager for another try. This time we chose the Hill of Sandfell for the route, and followed it until we gained the ridge uniting it to the mountain mass. Its surface consisted mainly of broken scoriaceous fragments, red and black, with here and there a little pumice. Sometimes these fragments would crunch beneath our feet; but here and there a fragile-looking piece would easily withstand the trampling of the party. Higher up we met with plates of basaltic lava, broken and disintegrated; and higher still with masses of obsidian and beds of pumice,

slowly crumbling into dust.[1] Beneath us, on our right was the glorious ice-fall of the Hofs Glacier. Upon the glacier itself rest heavy layers of snow, forming a compact covering. As crevasse after crevasse has formed, the snow has parted, together with the ice beneath; and thus the section shows a snow-crust sharply defined and cleanly cut, as with a giant's knife. Soon after eight o'clock we had our second breakfast, 3600 feet above the blue waters of the ocean, which glistened in the sunlight. At ten we reached the termination of the rocks, and roped, myself as leader, Páll next, and then my friend, with the other Icelanders behind; and so we entered on the snowfields, with a word of prayer and praise to Him whom they own as Lord.

'Father, who hast made the mountains,
Who hast formed each tiny flower,
Who hast filled the crystal fountains,
Who hast sent us sun and shower:
Hear Thy children's morning prayer,
Asking for Thy guardian care:
Keep and guide us all the day,
Lead us safely all the way.

Let Thy glorious creation
Be the whisper of Thy power;
New and wondrous revelation
Still unfolding every hour.'[2]

In half-an-hour my friend found it necessary to return, Jón Sigurthsson accompanying him. And then, hour after hour, we rose among a never-ending maze of wide and deep crevasses. Sometimes we gazed into their crystal depths in wonder at their vast profundity. So far we had been advancing towards a pile of frowning rock, the Knappr; but about one o'clock I found it better to strike straight for the backbone of the mountain. The surface of the snow was covered with innumerable crystals of transparent ice, pointing to windward, which crackled merrily under our feet. We found that one of these, with a bit of Kola candy and a meat biscuit, formed a most refreshing and exhilarating stimulant. As we approached the summit of the ridge, I noticed to the north a towering mass of snow, ending eastward in a rock pile. It looked at least as lofty as the Knappr we were bound for, but, led by what I understood to be the verdict of the locality, I turned away. A bank of snow led up to the north-west corner of the Knappr. We followed this, until a deep ice chasm intervened. Descending the north side of the bank we jumped into the chasm, and then prepared to climb the cone itself. But here the guides stood fast, and I heard that phrase of evil omen to an Icelandic traveller, *Ekki lingra* (No further). So

[1] Mackenzie notes that pumice generally occurs above obsidian, and he considers that it bears 'the same relation to the latter as the common slags of a stream of lava bear to the body of lava.'

[2] F. R. Havergal.

casting off the rope, I cut my own way up the shining pyramid of ice which crowns the Knappr. After an hour's hard work I found myself upon its rounded head, and saw at once that I was standing above the rocks which Mr. Holland reached.

But the aneroid proved, what I had long suspected, that this was not the real summit. True, it was the southern peak, 5600 feet in height, but the central yet remained unconquered. Descending to the guides, I roped again. Two-and-a-half miles of snowfield lay between us and the snow-pile I had noticed as we reached the ridge. In an hour we covered these, during the latter half of which we had a grand crevasse, a mile in length, upon our left. In form, the cross ridge we were gaining looked like a lion lying right athwart our path. The ascent of his flank cost an hour-and-a-half, for the lower inclines were extremely steep, and above the ice had given way on a slope, so sharp that the front lips of the series of superb crevasses had often fallen far below the rear ones, from the edge of which fantastic fringes of enormous icicles hung down into the depths. However, here, where the ice walls joined each other, or there, where my camera legs were requisitioned to reinforce a doubtful snow-wreath, we slowly rose, until, at 6400 feet, the dome was gained by half-past seven. Our view was sadly circumscribed by the driving sleet and snow; but now and then the wind tore its way through the cloud cap that surrounded us, and gave us glimpses of the snowfields of the Vatna, or the sand wastes of the Skeithará. In fifteen minutes we were off; at half-past ten we left the snow, and three hours later reached the home-like parsonage.



THE ACTUAL SUMMIT OF THE ÖRÆFA JÖKULL.

The journey across the Sandr is always more or less dreary, but little tufts of grass and stonecrop relieve the monotony, and here and there a splendid epilobium displays its head of large pink flowers, in striking contrast with the desolation. Should the day be warm, the distant tufts of grass are

metamorphosed by mirage into groves of palm-trees, on the brink of wide-extending lakes. Near the Skeithará itself are many curious holes, circular in shape, and generally half full of water; they are supposed to be the beds whereon icebergs from the glacier masses have been liquefied. At Núpstathr, basalt appears again, and a slope is strewn with shapely columns, overthrown by an earthquake. From this spot Mr. Watts departed on his adventurous journey across the snowfields of the Vatna, among which he spent twelve days, sometimes lying with his men for many hours together in a hole in the snow, covered by his tent, while fearful snow-storms raged without. On descending



ICE-HOLES NEAR THE SKEITHARÁ.

the northern glaciers, he had still four days' march to Grimstathir. He found that several jagged peaks protruded through the vast white mass. One of these he called Mount Paul, in honour of his leading guide, whom the Icelanders, I find, have ever since dubbed Páll Jökull!

At Kirkjubær there was in ancient days a Benedictine monastery, founded in 1186, but not a trace remains. It has vanished as completely as its builders' rule from Iceland. A set of fine basaltic pillars, whose light grey tops are level with the black volcanic sand, with which they form a striking contrast, tradition says, the monks made use of as a kitchen floor.

Between Núpstathr and Kirkjubær, in the Hverfísfljót valley, we passed

round the southern end of the eastern Skaptá lava stream, and a few miles west of Kirkjubær we reached the eastern limit of the western stream. The two together formed the most enormous molten flood that ever devastated peopled lands, within the period of historic record. About the end of May, 1783, a thin blue smoke was seen to rise behind the Skaptárfells; by the 8th of June it changed into an awful, wall-like mass of smoke and ashes, from whence proceeded showers of cinders, and of hair-like filaments of lava, while earthquake shocks and peals of thunder, with violent subterranean detonations and reports, occurred in quick and dread succession. On the 10th lurid gleams of pillars as of fire appeared within the dense black mass; next day the Skaptá suddenly dried up, and like a foaming sea there burst upon the lowlands a frightful lava stream, while over all a dense mephitic vapour brooded, through which the sun could only now and then be seen like a blood-red globe. The valley of the Skaptá was in places six hundred feet in depth, but the glowing torrent filled it to the brim.



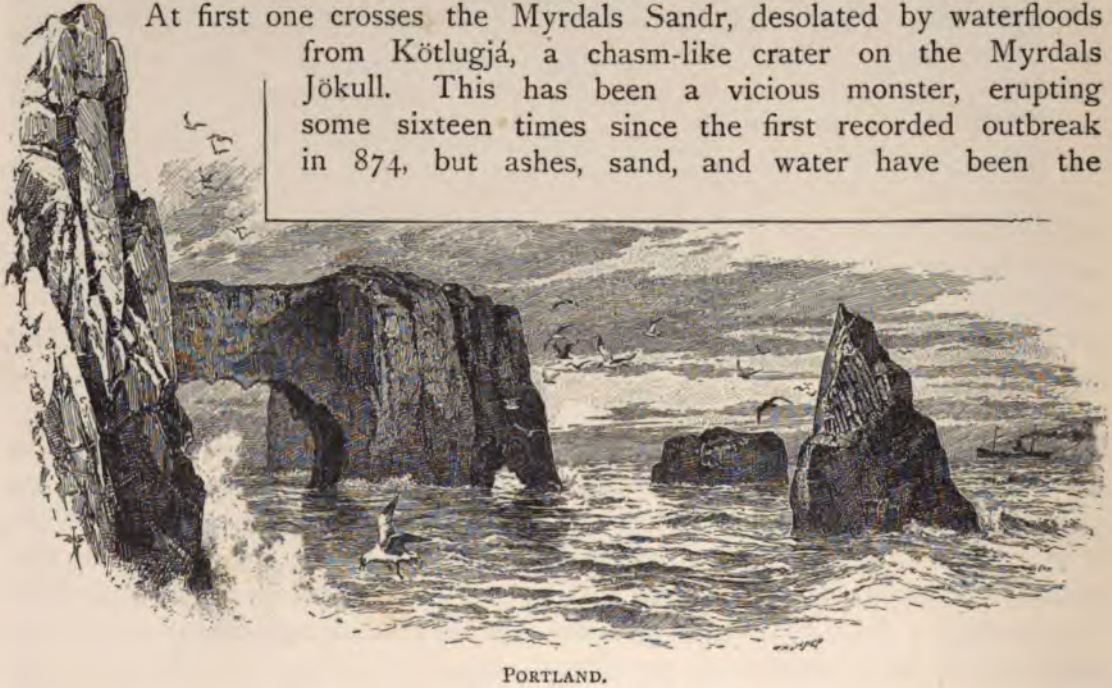
Basaltic Pillars at Kirkjubær.

On the 18th, so vast a flood appeared that, by its waves great glowing rocks were rolled along above the earlier streams, while the waters of the river came down as well, in hissing, seething, bubbling fountains. And these continued until July the 2nd. Meanwhile another wall of smoke and ashes rose in the valley of the Hverfísfljót, whose waters also ceased, and on the 9th of August the eastern stream enacted there the havoc of its predecessor. Nor did the valleys only suffer, for the ashes and the pumice, the sulphurous and other noxious vapours spread far and wide. The grass was covered, calcined, or destroyed, and the starved and poisoned animals died by thousands, or ate the very hair and flesh from one another. A new disease appeared, for sheep and cattle, and even men, were seized with loathsome swellings, their jaws became inflamed, their teeth were loosened and became dislodged. Magnus Stevensen, in whose 'account' the full particulars are given, asserts that 9336 human beings, 28,000 horses, 11,461 cattle, and 190,488 sheep, perished within two years;

but these amounts are thought excessive. The most moderate calculation, however, enumerates 1300 human beings, 19,488 horses, 6801 cattle, and 129,937 sheep.

The total length of the first stream was nearly fifty miles, with a width that varied from two or three to ten or twelve. The second was nearly twenty miles in length, but not so wide. Estimates of the quantity of lava vary from fifty thousand million to six hundred billion cubic yards—from the total bulk of Hekla to a mass no smaller than Mont Blanc! As I crossed the stream, I found it piled in jagged, shapeless masses, as sharp and clinker-like as when it first solidified. Near the river, where the conflict was the wildest, the heaps are most distorted, and frequently the lava crust has been shattered by explosions, which have piled the plates on end, like gravestones for the buried victims. Mr. Stevensen visited the Blængr a year after the eruption, but found the lava too hot to traverse. Dr. Anderson, in 1890, reached the craters, and found that they extended for miles along a fissure, clearly visible in many places. As an illustration of volcanic habit, it may be noted that violent earthquakes occurred in Sicily and in Calabria in the months preceding these events.

From Búland, or from Ásar, two tracks lead westward, one behind the mountains, bleak and wild, between the Merkr and the Torfa Glaciers, the other by the coast, one day longer, but much more interesting. At first one crosses the Myrdals Sandr, desolated by waterfloods from Kötlugjá, a chasm-like crater on the Myrdals Jökull. This has been a vicious monster, erupting some sixteen times since the first recorded outbreak in 874, but ashes, sand, and water have been the



PORTLAND.

products rather than lava. So enormous have been the floods, that they have brought down icebergs from the glacier huge enough to lie aground

seven miles out at sea, in a hundred fathoms of water. Indeed, the barrier of ice was piled so high by the eruption of 1721, that the people at Höfthabrekka, a farm situated some hundreds of feet above the sea, could not perceive the little homestead on the top of Hjörleifshöfthi, 600 feet above sea-level.

It will be remembered that this was the landing-place of one of Iceland's earliest colonists, and very fine the rock walls of the headland are, rising abruptly from the sand. I was told that a little child, belonging to the homestead, was one day playing on the cliffs, when she missed her footing, and fell headlong down a precipice 168 feet in depth. The frantic parents hastened to the spot, expecting to bring home the lifeless corpse, but found her scarcely anything the worse.

At Vikr are several caves at the foot of craggy rocks, alive with sea birds. These are Fulmar petrels, and they fly around in myriads, or clothe the rocks from top to half-way down with lines and dots of snowy plumage. Here is an excellent farm, whose owner is a bookseller and semi-storekeeper as well. Opposite to his house rise the lovely pinnacles of Reynisdrángr, resembling closely the 'Needles' off the Isle of Wight, except that these are brown instead of white. Beyond lies Dyrhólaey, or the Door Hill Isle, a fine, imposing promontory, pierced by a noble natural arch, through which a ship might pass, were it safe for her to sail so near the land. It is the most southerly point of Iceland, and is known by the alternative name of Portland.



ICE CONES ON THE BREITHAMERKR JÖKULL.

CHAPTER V.

HEKLA AND BURNT NJAL'S COUNTRY.

THANKS to an introduction from Sjera Jón, of Bjarnanes, I travelled, for several days after leaving Víkr, with Herra Olafsson, a southern *sýslamadr*, and Herra B. M. Olsen, Ph.D., of Reykjavík. This was a change indeed from our solitary wanderings in the south-east, where for days together no other passenger was seen, and I was fortunate in witnessing the manner in which these Icelanders themselves are wont to 'fare' across their native land.

The old fourfold partition of the island has given way to north and south divisions into *amts*, whereof the governor of the southern, and, in some sense, of the whole, resides at Reykjavík, and the lieutenant-governor of the north at Akureyri. The *amts* are subdivided into eighteen *sýslar*, or counties, and these again into one hundred and sixty-nine *hveppur*, or poor-law districts. Each *sýsla* is in charge of a *sysselman*, or sheriff, local judge, and inland revenue official, whose gold-laced coat is generally in evidence at all the larger ports.

Mr. Olafsson had been at Kirkjubær, but was on the point of moving west. Both he and Dr. Olsen had many friends along the route. Sometimes these turned out with us in the morning. Throughout the day festivities continued; a breakfast here, another there, and nondescripts between till supper time. On our right, as we journeyed, were the snow-fields of the Eyjafjallajökull, which 'floats in air,' the natives say. From it

THE CRATER OF MOUNT HEKLA.

proceeds a very rapid drainage river, the Jökulsá i Solheimar Sandr, better known as the Fúlilækr, or the Foul-stream, a name earned for it by its filthy smell, precisely that of rotten eggs, due, of course, to impregnation with sulphuretted hydrogen. It bursts from underneath the glacier, like its brother of the Breithamerkr, but is not so large a stream. Professor Paijkull entered one of the caves from which it issues, and found it 'about seven or eight feet in height and between twenty and thirty feet in length.' 'When I had come in,' says he, 'under this arch I feasted my eyes with the sight of the emerald-green ice that formed the thin roof, through which the daylight shone.' The river is very subject to sudden floods, called Jökulhlaups, due to the collection in the glacier itself of vast masses of water, which at intervals break the barriers that confine them and descend upon the plain. High railway-embankment-like stone ridges mark the devastation they have wrought.



ICELANDIC LADY'S SADDLE.

The reason for the river's present course is easily found on Saga lines. Two wizards dwelt here, once upon a time. Thrasi, on the Skógar Plain, beheld a water-rush, and turned it by his spells upon the lands of his neighbour, Lothmundr. A slave brought his master word that the sea was breaking in from the north. Lothmundr makes him bring a bucketful, and soon finds out that this is not sea-water; so he fares unto the flood, and plants therein his staff, with a ring upon the top. He bites the ring, and lo, the flood betakes itself to Thrasi's side. And then each wizard strives to outwit the other, until they meet, and settle where the bed shall be.

My travelling companions, and their friends at Skógar and Holt, were fearful of the strength of my pony's lanky legs; so one lent me another horse, and the two took quite paternal charge, riding on each side of me, lest the sweep of the icy current should prove too strong. A bath in those swirling muddy waves would certainly be far from pleasant, and might easily be something worse; but the distance is soon covered, and all got safely over, including the Sysselman's wife. What! says some one, can ladies travel in Iceland? Certainly, as witness the expeditions of Miss Oswald and Miss Adelia Gates. True, Miss Oswald was stopped by this very stream, but not for her own sake. A companion refused to venture, yet such is the fascination of Icelandic travel, that the companion herself

returned another year. Icelandic ladies have an arm-chair-like saddle, from which depends a little foot-board, and the decoration of the leather and of the saddle-cloth which covers it is often very handsome.

As we leave the river, Dr. Olsen tells me of Grímur Thomsen's song about it, beginning, 'Ridu nu meth mjer á Sólheimasand,' of which we give a translation which retains the original metre :—

'Come ride we to Sólheima-sand, where the brine
Its breakers and roaring hushes never,
And Jökulsá the ice-fleeces twist into twine,
And towards the sea the "Jökul" peers for ever.

And yet is that coast somewhat silent and lone,
No sound any living creatures raise there;
And Jökulsa talks to herself all alone,
And few will guess the sense of what she says there.'

Grímur Thomsen stands well among modern Icelandic poets, and is likely to be popular, since he embodies in his verse the homely folk-speech phrases and peasant thoughts of those who, after all, are not unpleased to find old friends among poetic fancies.

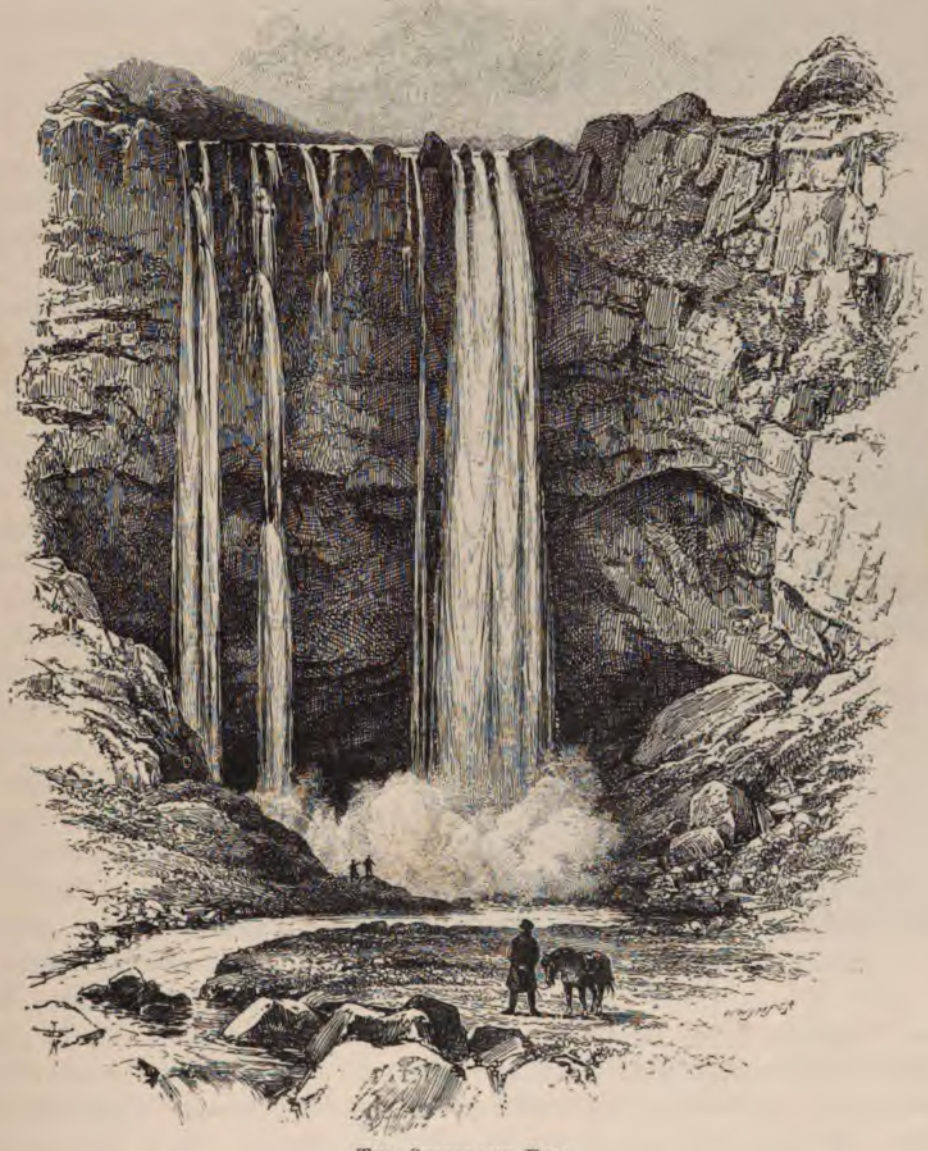
After coffee in the Hreppstjori's cosy sitting-room, we cantered on to see the famous Skógar Foss. It pours in a clean unbroken sheet over a perpendicular rock, some hundred and fifty feet in height, within a small ravine, with steady roar, says Miss Oswald, 'like a sustained chord on the pedals of an organ.' Of course there is a chest of gold beneath the darksome pool into which its waters fall. There nearly always is behind an Icelandic waterfall. The wizard Thrasi is credited with hiding this one :—

'Thrasi's box is precious
Under Skógar's force,
Whoso thither goeth
Folly hath enough.'

Our resting-place that night was Thorvaldseiri, a brand-new house, that bears the name of its energetic owner, Thorvaldur Bjarnason, an Althing man, or Reykjavík M.P., who has reclaimed the broad acres of his farm from swamp and stone-waste, and made the wilderness indeed to smile; but whatever wicked Troll has led him to make a roof of galvanised iron? I think he is the same of whom Miss Oswald tells, that in a certain farmer's dairy she found a clear, swift stream which ran around within, a natural refrigerator. The entrance to his home is a portion of a Frenchman's wreck, and his sheepfolds bear as marks the name-boards of some poor fellows' fishing-smacks. Along this coast, too, the sea-borne spoils of southern lands are plentiful. At Svinafell, I saw mahogany blocks in use to cap a garden wall; but here, from one single beam, our kindly host had had two tables made, two secretaires, two chest-upon-chests, and four

ordinary chests of drawers! The dimensions of the Gulf Stream's gift were 22 feet × 3 × 3.

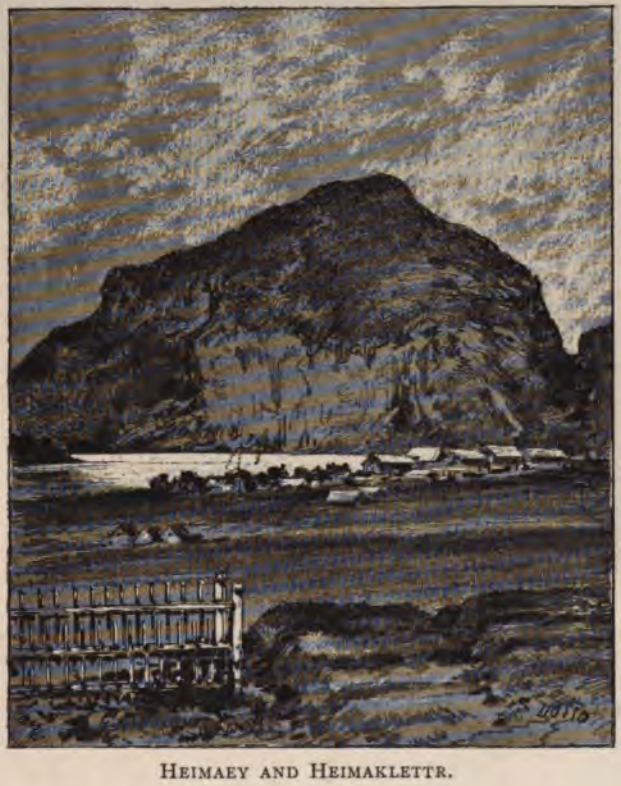
High up behind the farm are the sparkling snows of the lovely



THE SELJALAND FOSS.

Eyjafjalla, the craggy peaks of whose lower heights tower finely up from the meadowland, which now takes the place of the sands over which we have travelled so long. Near Holt, these fine rock walls are honeycombed in several places by caves, into which, no doubt, the sea-waves rolled before the island reached its present level, for Iceland, like all the northern

lands, is slowly, very slowly, but surely, rising from out the azure main. One of these caves was the lair of a certain Hrútr, a famous semi-viking, semi-troll, whose slaves disposed of him as Hjörleif's did of their lord. The upper cavern is draped with ferns. A few occurred at Hafrafell and Núpstathr, but they are not too frequent here. Beyond are several pretty fosses. One of these, the Drífanti, much more like the Staubbach than is the Skógar, which has somewhat thoughtlessly been compared with the Swiss fall, hangs down a cliff several hundred feet in height, the drifting plaything of the winds. It acts as a barometer to the boatmen of the Vestmannaeyjar, who cross to the mainland readily enough if the pendent foss be fairly steady, but hesitate when they see it driven in spray before the blast. A little further is the Seljalands, a double fall of greater bulk, behind which one may creep; and I heard of yet another, the Gljufrafoss, which is said to fall at once over three sides of some secluded cleft. To the left lies a partly upheaved mountain mass, whose summits peep out of the ocean, like a group of inquisitive mermaidens. Storm-lashed and cloud-capped, shoreless and lonely are most of them, but dotting the cliffs are myriads and myriads of sea-birds. Known, for short, as the 'Westmans,' one especially reminds us of homelands, for surely 'Erlendsey' must be but another 'Ireland's Eye,' or Isle. Heimaey, the largest, has a little town of some five or six hundred inhabitants, fishermen and fowlers. The Fulmar petrels and the puffins are the mainstay of the islanders; the eggs and flesh are eaten, although the smell is almost unendurable, and permeates the eater and his home; the part uneaten is used to cook the rest, for the dried bodies of the oily birds eke out the scanty stock of fuel. Travellers used to say that not a single child born here survived for many weeks, but hospitals have now been built, and purer air and better food have brought a welcome change.



HEIMAEY AND HEIMAKLETTR.

Before us now opens out the delta of the Markarfljót, or Marches flood,

a stream which drains the Gothalands, the Merkr and the Torfa Jökulls. There is a mountain gorge between the latter, in which, in true Icelandic topsy-turviness, crystal snow and verdant lawns, glacier ice, volcanic sand, and the bosky dells of *Thórsmörk*, take it in turns to fringe the flood, that hurries oceanwards in four great streams, the Markarfljót, the Alar, the Affall, and the Thverá. Sometimes one is large, sometimes another, for a shifting sandbank at the angle will turn the bulk of rushing water now to right and now to left. The plain through which they flow is tiresome in its uniformity; mile follows mile of boggy grassland, every rising hummock crowned with a little homestead. In the southern portion one almost needs a guide from farm to farm, save where little peat and shingle causeways have been laid upon the trembling morass. Without lies a sand reef, from which, in storm time, the upreflected waves are spurned in great surf-columns, the curtains of the deep. The whole is called Landeyjar, or the Land Isles. On a blazing summer day the flickering haze plays curious pranks with the hillocks, and, mirage-like, turns them into floating islands, while the haycocks stand for groves that vanish as we reach them.

But all this grass means food for horses, sheep, and cattle, which everywhere abound, and in the north across the Thverá lies a line of famous farms and parsonages, among which are Oddi and Breithabólstathr, whose hospitable doors have welcomed generations of weary wayfarers. Behind these lie the graceful triple peaks of the Thríhyrníngr, and twenty miles beyond the river uprises from the plain the ridge of Hekla. But the interest of the region centres in two grassy knolls, two of the sacred spots of classic Iceland, Hlithárendi and Bergthórshvoll, the homes of Gunnar and of Njal, the David and the Jonathan of old Icelandic story.

At 'Ledge End' dwelt the peerless Gunnar. His homestead on the 'Ledge,' a hundred feet above the river, overlooked the fertile meadow, which he loved so well, now disappearing fast beneath the Thverá's gnawing waves. In Dr. Dasent's fine translation of the Saga, we find a picture of him, handsome, blue-eyed, bright-eyed, courteous, bountiful, and gentle; strong and wealthy, able to leap his own height with all his war-gear, a skilful warrior, who 'smote so swiftly with his sword, that three seemed to flash through the air at once.'

At 'Bergthora's Knoll,' named after his 'high-spirited, brave-hearted' wife, dwelt Njal, wealthy, too, and handsome, 'so great a lawyer that his match was not to be found. Wise too he was, and fore-knowing and fore-sighted. Gentle and generous, he unravelled every man's knotty points who came to see him about them.'

In 974, Gunnar rode to the Thing, and there he met his evil genius, for 'It happened one day that Gunnar' 'saw a woman coming to meet him, and she was in goodly attire; but when they met she spoke to Gunnar at once' 'and bade him tell her of his voyages.' Hallgerda, already thrice a

widow, 'much mixed up with ill report,' was arrayed in 'scarlet cloak trimmed with needlework down to the waist. Her hair came down to her bosom, and was both fair and full. Gunnar was clad in the scarlet clothes which King Harold, Gorm's son, had given him; he had also the gold ring on his arm which Earl Hacon had given him.' The end was marriage.

Njal 'took it heavily.' 'Never shall she spoil our friendship,' says Gunnar. 'Ah! but that may come very near,' says Njal, 'and besides, thou wilt have always to make atonement for her.' And so he did. It was the custom for the friends to make alternate feasts. Down came Gunnar and his wife to Njal's, and met a hearty welcome. A quarrel soon begins about the rights of precedence, and afterwards Hallgerda takes Bergthora's hand and says, 'There's not much to choose though between you two. Thou hast hangnails on every finger, and Njal is beardless.' 'That's true,' says Bergthora, 'yet neither of us finds fault with the other for it; but Thorwald, thy husband, was not beardless, and yet thou plottedst his death.' Then Hallgerda said, 'It stands me in little stead to have the bravest man in Iceland if thou dost not avenge this, Gunnar!' Instead of which Gunnar wisely goes home. But Hallgerda soon has Swart, a thrall of Njal's, slain, and Bergthora brings about the slaying of the slayer; revenge succeeds revenge, the women's work throughout. 'Nothing,' says Dasent, 'can shake the friendship of Njal and Gunnar, who pay blood-fine after blood-fine for thrall, freedman, and kinsman, as the deeds of blood ascend in the social scale. A few years later Hallgerda sends a man to steal food from Kirkby. Gunnar comes home, and, seeing something unaccustomed, asks her whence it came, and her retort that 'it is no man's business to trouble himself with housekeeping,' raises his ire at last. Says he, 'Ill indeed is it if I am a partaker with thieves,' and with that he gave her a slap on the cheek. She said she would bear that slap in mind, and repay it if she could.

Poor Gunnar! all things seemed in league against him. From a certain horse-fight near the Eystri Rángá, troubles of the direst soon arose, yet honour too, for in a fearful fight at Knafahólar, where thirty men fell on the gallant Gunnar and his brothers, Hjört and Kolskegg, fourteen of the gang were slain. Then Starkad said, 'Let us fly now. We have not to do with men.' At last there falls a sentence of outlawry on Gunnar, but as he fares from home to reach his ship the horse he rides trips and throws him off. Turning, he sees his long-loved homestead, and he says, 'Fair is the Lithe; so fair that it has never seemed so fair to me.' And so he goes back to meet his fate. His enemies surround the house, where they find him almost all alone; but eight are wounded, and two are slain, before the end is reached. Thorbrand is one who springs upon the roof, and cuts the hero's bowstring, only to receive a bill-thrust in return. Says Gunnar then to Hallgerda, 'Give me two locks of thy hair, and ye two, my mother and thou, twist them together into a bowstring for me.' 'Does

aught lie on it?' Hallgerda says. 'My life,' he answers. 'Well!' she says, 'now I will call to thy mind that slap on the face which thou gavest me.' And so her spite denies the help. Eight more men are wounded. Then Gunnar sinks, worn out with toil, and 'at last it came about that they slew him,' while his wife, a prototype of Mary Queen of Scots, looked on.



ANCIENT WHALEBONE CARVING IN SKARTH CHURCH.

But we must turn to Njal himself, and Hauskuld, his foster-son, for whom Njal had sought and found a bride at Svinafell, Hildigunna, Flosi's niece. Njal found the pair a home at Ossaby, 'and there was such love between them all, that none of them thought anything that he said or did any worth, unless the others had a share in it. Hauskuld dwelt long at Ossaby, and each backed the other's honour, and Njal's sons were always in Hauskuld's company,' until there came a snake between them, the hateful Mord. Hauskuld's pure mind repelled his lying tales, but Njal's sons, the sons of Zeruiah of the story, listened. Friendship, on their part, paled into coldness, and died in suspicion. At last, Skarphedinn and the rest, with Kari their friend, went to Ossaby, and just at sunrise fell upon the guileless Hauskuld, who when he saw them tried to turn away. 'Don't try to turn on thy heel,' says Skarphedinn, and smites him on the head.

Hauskuld falling, prays, 'God help me, and forgive you.' The news soon spreads to Svinafell, and Flosi comes to Ossaby. Hildigunna's vengeance will brook no method of atonement save that of blood for blood.

Poor Flosi wants a fair atonement made, but Hildigunna flings over him the blood-stained robe that he had given Hauskuld, and fairly drives him on to the course which he frankly tells her 'will be the worst for all of us.' Yet at the Thing a price is fixed, the heap of silver formed, and the danger all but over, when Skarphedinn's bitter tongue stirs up the dying embers, and Flosi spurns the money. That autumn, he with his friends, one hundred and twenty in all, proceed to Bergthórshvoll; they leave their horses by a grassy knoll, and face the thirty men who form the household of the aged Njal.

A doomed group they felt themselves. The night before, Bergthora spoke to her household and said, 'Now shall ye choose your meat to-night, so that each may have what he likes best; for this evening is the last that I shall set meat before my household.' They held a council and decided to await the fight within. The foremost foeman fell beneath Skarphedinn's axe, and many were wounded by the spears which the beleaguered threw, till Flosi said, 'It is now clear that we shall never master them with weapons. There are but two choices left, and neither of them good—one is to turn away, and that is our death; the other, to set fire to the house, and burn them inside it; and that is a deed which we shall have to answer for heavily before God, since we are Christian men ourselves.' But the deed is done, and as the house begins to blaze Flosi offers passage to the women, most of whom pass out. Helgi Njalsson, with a cloak and kerchief over him, is led to join them, but Flosi spies 'a tall woman and broad across the shoulders,' and a stroke from his sword soon ends the flight of Helgi.[1]

Then Flosi offers leave to go to Njal, but the old man answers that he 'will not live in shame.' Then Flosi says to Bergthora, 'Come thou out, housewife, for I will for no sake burn thee indoors.' 'I was given away to Njal young,' said Bergthora, 'and I have promised him this, that we would both share the same fate.' After that they both went back into the house. 'What counsel shall we now take?' said Bergthora. 'We will go to our bed,' says Njal, 'and lay us down; I have long been eager for rest.' So they lie down, with little Thord, the son of Kari, between them. He too will stay. He says to Bergthora, 'It is much better to die with thee and Njal than to live after you.' Then Njal made the steward draw a fresh ox-hide over them, and they 'gave over their souls into God's hand;' and that was the last word that men heard them utter. Then up leaps Kari, flings a

[1] It is stated in the Saga that skyr was poured on the burning wood; and a remarkable proof of the accuracy of the tale has been supplied by the discovery on the site in recent years of clots of a whitish substance, evidently burned masses of the skyr.

blazing bench among the waiting gang without, and while they scatter he escapés. Skarphedinn follows, but the beam breaks under him; again he tries, but the wall-plate falls, and soon the roof gives way and shuts him in, and there he dies with a war-song on his lips.

The case is brought before the courts, and fines arranged for Njal and certain others; banishment is the burners' fate—Flosi for three years, some for ever. But Kari lives for further vengeance; some he slays in Iceland, Gunnar Lambi's son he smites at the very board of Earl Sigurthur in the Orkneys, and Kol while buying silver somewhere on the coast of Wales. Fifteen of the burners fall in the fight at Clontarf. And then the foemen fare to Rome, and Flosi gets absolution from the Pope, who, of course, makes a good thing out of it, since for the absolution Flosi 'gave a great sum of money.' A year later Kari follows and gets his absolution, presumably for a consideration also. On his way home, his ship is wrecked at Ingólfshöfthi, not far from Svínafell, where Flosi lived. Right to the house goes Kari, and peace is made at last. A new homestead has arisen at Bergthórshvoll, a few yards north of the old one, and a bright new bedroom with walls and roof of Norway pine awaits the visitor.

Hlithárendi was famed in later times as the birthplace of Bjarni Thorarensen—he who compared the Thverá to Mithgarth's worm, gnawing at the root of Yggdrasil, the fabled ash of Scandinavian Mythology. Miss Oswald gives a translation of one of his verses too good to be omitted:—

'The skerry away in the fjord,
So deep in the sea's unrest,
In silence endures for ever
The foam that beats on its breast.

Mean is the man who is weaker
Than senseless rock in the strife,
And yields to the clash of the billows,
The countering currents of life.'

At Teigr, a little further west, was born Jón Thorlaksson, who translated Milton's *Paradise Lost* into Icelandic, and at Oddí, most famous of all, Sæmundr-Fróthi, or the Learned, in 1056. Living but half a century after the events above recorded, and perhaps the first who wrote Icelandic books, he is credited with the authorship, or rather editorship, of *Njála*, and of the 'Elder,' or 'Poetic' Edda. Says Mr. Metcalfe, 'Innumerable are the tales told of his adventures with the Evil One. We have all heard of that underground school where the pupils

"Learned the art which none may name,
In Padua far beyond the sea."

Where a grey shaggy hand was protruded through a hole daily with their victuals; where the school-books were written in letters of fire, which might

be seen in the dark; where the devil was the master, and his only honorarium the last student who passed through the self-revolving iron door at the year's end—"the devil take the hindmost,"— and how, on one occasion, the last student outwitted the fiend, who only got the shadow instead of the substance. Now this curious tale is generally connected in the minds of Britons with that arch necromancer, Michael Scott; but in Icelandic tradition it is Sæmundr who puts the cheat on the satanic dominie. The way, however, in which he accomplished it is this: He hung his mantle loosely over his shoulders, taking care not to put his arms in the sleeves. As he moved out last, the schoolmaster made a grab at him, but, dexterously ducking, he escaped, leaving the cloak in his place.' In later years the scholar and the master exchanged positions, and Satan became Sæmundr's slave; at least tradition says so, and tells the method too. The tempted asked the tempter how small he could make himself. 'As small as a fly,' said he. Sæmundr bored a hole in a beam, and challenged him to prove his words by creeping in. No sooner said than done, but quite as promptly the priest of Oddi plugged him in, and kept him captive till he promised evermore to do his bidding. Oftentimes he struggled for his freedom from the service, but in vain. Once he jumped into a bowl of milk, hoping that the priest would swallow him, and open up a chance of ransom, but Sæmundr spied him there, tied him up in a calf-skin, and carried him off to church, where he made him stay while he said mass.

The story of the rhyming contest is well known; how the parson bet the black man his soul that he would find a rhyme to any line in Latin or Icelandic. Said he, *Nunc tibi deest gramen*, to which Sæmundr answered, *Digito tu terge foramen.* From the church roof shouted Satan, *Hæc domus est alta*, capped at once by the priest with *Si vis descendere salta.* The contest ended with a mixture of languages; *Vidisti quomodo fór nú*, as a retort to *Nunc bibis ex cornu.* The devil asserted that he had won over the latter, but the priest maintained that *fór nú* was good Latin! Other stories may be seen in Forbes.

Oddi takes its name 'point,' *i.e.* of land, from its position between the two *Rangás*, or 'wrong,' that is, crooked waters, which fall into the Thverá within a few miles of each other. At first the land is flat and fertile, like Landeyjar. We stayed at a farm here one night, and next morning I experienced for the first time the common fate of travellers in this land of queer reverses. My horses had decamped, and though many a mile of the tussocky fenceless plain was visible, the ponies were nowhere to be seen. My friend the Sysselman, however, promptly set out in chase, while I strolled up to the top of a little rising ground behind the farm, to look at the far-famed Hekla, the Cloak, or, strictly speaking, Heklufjall, the cloaked mountain, a reference to the cape of snow she wears; or perhaps

as well, the hood of cloud which often drifts around her head. At this distance, five-and-twenty miles, and standing 'end on,' so that her three peaks are merged into one, she looks but an ordinary hill, though in reality sixth among Icelandic heights: Oræfa Jökull, 6426 feet; East Snæfell, 5982; Vatna Jökull, not ascertained, about 6000; Eyjafjalla Jökull, 5593; Herthubreith, 5446; Hekla, 5108.

While standing here, I was accosted by the farmer, who informed me that my position was hardly safe, seeing that a cavern some ten or fifteen feet in depth was underneath, of which the rising ground was but the somewhat fragile roof. These caverns, it appears, are sometimes used as storehouses for hay. Some are simply bubbles in ancient lava streams, others are excavated on purpose, though haystacks hereabout are often built in the open air and covered with long bands of turf, secured by ropes, to which are fastened blocks of stone or lava. In an hour or two the Sysselman returned with the truant ponies.



DISTANT VIEW OF MOUNT HEKLA.

The rallying-point of travellers from the west to Hekla is, as a rule, the parsonage of Stóruvellir, a home whose peace and comfort have been highly praised by many a visitor. An early start is made, and in an hour or two the Vestri Rángá is reached, over a sandy plain with blocks of lava here and there, and now and then some ugly rifts among the lines of ancient scoria, for one at least of the older streams has pushed its way almost as far as Stóruvellir. Should the weather have been bad, the crossing of the river may be somewhat troublesome, especially to a traveller unprepared to deal with rivers such as these; but with shoes and stockings off, and knees drawn up to grip the saddle, there need be little trouble. Sometimes, in a rougher stream than this, the mount may prove unsteady; if so, the reins may be loosely thrown across one arm, and the fingers knotted in the pony's mane. It may not be very dignified, but it is an excellent safeguard,

and dignity and Iceland rivers by no means suit each other. The waters of the Rángá are beautifully clear and bright, in striking contrast with the turbid currents of its neighbours. Wild geese are by no means uncommon along its banks, which here and there present a specimen or two of an Icelandic 'wood,' a stunted copse of birch.

Selsund, Galtalækr, with its curious ornamentation of weather-whitened mutton-bones, and Næfrholt (Birch Hill), have all been named as starting-places for the actual ascent, but there can be no doubt that the latter is by far the best. It lies in a little oasis on the west of the mountain, which is the side from which most of the later outbreaks have proceeded; indeed, the lava-stream of 1845 destroyed its tun, or home-field. From Næfrholt to the summit is about six or seven miles, and ponies may be ridden for about half the distance. The farmer will provide iron-shod poles, and will act as guide. At first the track leads over grassy slopes, which the lava has spared, although the streams of it, which have crossed and re-crossed each other, are in evidence everywhere, intermingled with sand-wastes, ash-cones, and heaps of the roughest and most repulsive cinders and scoriæ which can be imagined. Further up, a kind of gorge in the mountain side is entered, within which lies a somewhat extensive amphitheatre, which Mr. Metcalfe's guide calls the 'nave of the church,' whose choir is entered a little further on, through a gap in the lava, which 'by a little stretch of the imagination might be construed into a ruined archway.'

Care is needed continually, as the pieces of slag are often covered with moss, which hides the spaces between, and a slip, coming when one is unprepared, may result in too close contact with the shaggy edges of the once-molten rock. Beyond are crumbling sand-hills, portions of the tufa of which the mountain mass is formed. Their breaking up would probably proceed much faster, but for the lava streams that serve to bind the mass together. The ponies are left at a height of about 2000 to 2500 feet, and are generally tied heads and tails together, with the tail of the last secured to the head of the first, so that they form a circle, a most effectual method of preventing them from straying. Mr. Forbes, whose excellent account should be read by all whose thoughts are tending to the 'Norrard,' found the melr, or wild oats growing here, upon the little sand-hills which it so much loves. He refers to its occurrence in Myrdal, and the southern sands, where I have seen it, but not in such abundance as he implies. Probably less care is taken of it now, since foreign grain is more available.

The spot where the horses are left will probably be close to the root of the Næfrholt lava-stream which came from a rift in the mountain side, and the fag-end of its grisly clinker heaps must be crossed. Poor Ida Pfeiffer plaintively says, 'I do not know how often I fell and cut my hands on the jagged points.' But this over, a bed of black sand affords better going, until the snow is reached, about two-thirds up the whole.

Here the contrast between the white snow-slopes and the black lava walls which hem them in is very striking. In five hours from Næfrholt, Mr. Forbes reached 'the brink of the crater, the eastern side of which forms the southern cone.' 'It is,' says he, 'nearly circular, about half-a-mile in circumference, and from two to three hundred feet deep.' Most travellers agree in depicting the vast hollow, with its beds of hardened snow, in which here and there jets of steam or sulphurous fume have hollowed caverns in miniature cloisters and arcades, through the sides and roofs of which a pale blue



APPROACHING HEKLA.

light was visible to some who ventured in. The ridge leading up to the cone, and that connecting it with the higher central peak, are sharp in the extreme, only two or three feet wide, and as they are formed of crumbling slags, the footing is anything but secure. On either side is a precipice, that on the east being nearly a thousand feet in depth. Mackenzie and Metcalfe both noticed that the temperature rose rapidly a few feet beneath the surface; the former states 144°, the latter 89½° Fahr.

On a fine day, the view is certainly one of the most varied to be found on the face of the earth. To the south-east are the shining snowfields of the Torfa, Merkr, and Eyjafjalla Jökulls, near enough to be distinctly visible.

South are the great plains of the Markarfljót, with the Thríhyrningr's triple peak in the foreground, while beyond them, over forty miles away, the basaltic masses of the Westmans rise from their ocean bed. Westward lies the valley of the mighty Thjorsá, channel of the icy streams from four or five great central glacier mountains, which each in turn attract our notice, till it rests upon the ice-fields of the Skaptár Jökull, sixty miles N.E., across the desert plain, where Mackenzie revelled in his stream of almost pure obsidian, with its coat of crumbling pumice. In speaking of the compass points in Iceland, it must never be forgotten that thirty degrees in the east, and forty degrees in the west, must be allowed for 'variation;' so that in this district, speaking roughly, when the needle points to north, the true direction is north-east, and when we are looking to the north, then the compass says north-west. Says Forbes, 'Whether we consider the unique character of this island-pandemonium of volcanoes, or ramble from the awe-thrilling powers of Skaptár (Jökull) to the more delicate mechanism of that matchless natural fountain (Geysir), or the dogged energies slumbering beneath our feet, we wander into the realms of hidden causes, and, alike bewildered and bewitched, are more than ever convinced of our nothingness, for if there be sermons in stones, volumes are unopened here.'

Of course, compared with Etna or Vesuvius, Hekla falls far behind, just as in destructiveness the Skaptár Jökull signally eclipses it, and Kötlugjá's ejectamenta dwarf its lava beds and cinder heaps into comparative insignificance. Its fame depends upon the frequency of its eruptions, and doubtless too, to some extent, upon its nearness to the more populated districts of the island. It has blazed forth upon an average once in every generation, since the year 1000, and never has a century passed without an outbreak, some twenty-six of which have been recorded.

It must be granted, too, that the sights and sounds of 1845 were quite sufficient to appal an ordinary mortal. Paijkull gives a long description, from which we learn that the period of activity lasted, with pauses now and then, from the beginning of September to the following April. A dark cloud overhead, from whence a sand shower fell, and detonations with rumblings as of thunder, heard as far as Grimsey, nearly two hundred miles away, introduced the more active features of eruption. 'Vaporous exhalations could be seen to issue from the mouth of the crater, brightly illumined by the glare of the glowing mass in the interior of the mountain.' This of course produced the same appearance as if a sheet of flame were issuing, and then the lava burst forth, which seems to have moved but slowly, for it was a week before it reached more than half-a-mile beyond the mountain's actual foot. The ashes which accompanied it were carried to the Faroes and the Orkneys at a speed approaching four-and-twenty miles an hour. In September, rumblings, sounding like a constant cannonade, were heard, caused by bubbles of steam uprising and hurling out the lava, in the form of slags and sand.



THE GULLFOSS, ICELAND.

See page 125.



CHAPTER VI.

Reykir and Reykjavík.

FROM the Hekla district, a traveller, crossing the island but once, should proceed northward to Gullfoss and Geysir, and thence by Thingvellir's classic fields to Reykjavík; but we are hastening there direct, and will give the Goldforce and the Gusher a chapter to themselves. The country between the Rángá and the Thjórsá is monotonous after the mountains of the south, but its rolling grassy hills are an improvement on the marshes of Landeyjar, though bogs are not by any means unknown among them. Midway we meet the wretched little Rauthalækr, or Red Brook; either the stream or the road does not know its own mind, for we have to cross the water eighteen times. When the bed is good, and the depth but little, our party dashes in at full speed, and the splashing may be well imagined. The terminations of these river names are almost universally significant. *Lækr* is a brook; *Kvísl*, a forked stream, dividing constantly, as the glacier outlets almost always do; *á* is the regular river name; and *fljót*, the flood.

The Thjórsá is a serious matter. From its sources in the ice caverns of the central glaciers to the great lagoon which receives its own waters and those of the Thverá, its course exceeds 120 miles, while here its bed is half a mile wide, and fording out of the question, but a ferry exists instead.

Baggage is unstrapped and carried down to the capacious boats, cords are passed round the lower jaws of the poor ponies, who will have to swim for it, and we are off, with the animals in tow. Some travellers have written most sensational descriptions of their 'staring eye-balls' and 'corrugated nostrils.' On the whole they seem to take it very well, though now and then a lapping wave provokes an extra snort. Some time before the shore is reached we run aground upon the outer edge of a great black sandbank. Out jump a couple of the men; knee-deep or so they find the chilly waters, but an Icelander seems just as much at home in a river bed as on dry land. We load again, and mount, and wade the rest. It is a noble river, notwithstanding that its rushing waves are muddy with the dark offscourings of the Hofs and Skaptár Jökulls. The porous nature of the friable Icelandic palagonite should make it an easy prey to glacier scratchings, were the motions of the ice-masses only faster. Indeed, the wonder is that more is not denuded. That the glaciers occupy the valleys is manifest; that they ever carved them from the mountain side, especially in the basalt regions of the north and east, is more than doubtful. The very prominence of Icelandic *roches moutonnées* prompts the question, Why were these rocks not ground away, if the valley is the glacier's work?

On the further brink my friends departed for a time, and I proceeded with a postman whose train had followed ours across the river. A solitary traveller might easily do worse than join himself unto a postman, if well mounted, like the man of letters, and not averse to sometimes rapid progress. Eight times a year, in each direction, the postmen cover all the main lines of intercourse throughout the island. Should a Sunday intervene, they may make it possible to wait. This man had eight or nine animals, tied heads and tails, in common fashion. The mails are carried in boxes of the usual type, painted a home-like post office red. I had intended journeying to Hraungerthi alone, but Dr. Olsen warned me of the dreadful marshes here. 'If you once get in, you will never come out,' said he.

At the first farmhouse we came to, off jumped the leader, and sidled up to me with the well-known query, 'Café?' 'Já,' said I, and in we went. The coffee was better than the farm, which seemed to have no guest-room; at any rate we were led into the *bathstofa*, where was a poor little fellow with a bad sore-throat. Affections of the throat, and lungs, and skin, are common; and little wonder, when the damp and dirt too often witnessed in the smaller homes are coupled with the reeking bogs whereon the people most do congregate. Drainage without is the first great need of half the farms, with fresh air and cleanliness within. The sheepskin shoes in universal wear give no protection against the wet, and all day long the people toil with soddened feet, a practice which naturally leads to all rheumatic troubles.

After leaving the farm we ascended a swampy bank until we were able

to look down upon a little river flowing round the ancient lava stream from which Hraungerthi (Lava-Garth) takes its name. Suddenly my guide discovered that he was two horses short! I offered at once to take charge of the convoy while he galloped back in search of the untied ones. Seizing the cord attached to the head of the foremost, and shouting the native exhortation, a sound between 'Ho' and 'Haw,' I succeeded in setting the shortened train in motion. But when we reached the river a difficulty arose in the shape of a bridge, which an Iceland horse of all things hates the most. Dismounting, I coaxed, and drove, and whipped, and pulled, till the passage was effected. Then came the lava bed with its savage corners and cranky angular scars, while between them were hollows with pools of water, or beds of bright green grass, which the ponies coveted one and all. A steady old stager or two in front, however, moved faithfully on, climbing like cats on a gabled roof, but others held back, and the rotten old ropes gave way between them. In high glee at their freedom, the hindmost set made rushes round each other, till they tied themselves tight in a lovely knot, and had to be quiet—or strangled—at last. Meanwhile the rain, which began on the hill, came splashing and clattering down, to add to the general liveliness. Forming a base of the steadier sort, I loosened and freed the others, tying them on again one by one till the chain was nearly complete, when up came the postman bringing the lost ones, and we recommenced our pilgrimage through the lava labyrinth.



SHEEPSKIN SHOE AND DOUBLE-THUMBED MITTEN.

At Hraungerthi I found a capital parsonage. The old pastor is assisted by his son, whose room, I believe, was prepared for me. On the table lay a copy of the English Revised Version! The ordinary guest-chamber has here become a bright little dining-room. Its windows were perfectly brilliant with flowers—cinerarias, pelargoniums, fuchsias, and mignonette. A supper to match, and couches and easy-chairs, completed the contrast between inside and out. The church is good, and the carved work over the communion table and round the pulpit very interesting. As usual, paint

of brilliant hue has been liberally bestowed. Clothes were hanging up on the wall, as many a traveller has noted; though the old practice of making the churches sleeping-rooms has long been discontinued.

The whole of the country between Thjórsá and Ölfusá is thickly populated, and several miles up country is a huge collection of sheep-pens, where Mr. Watts says that, in autumn, seventeen thousand sheep are gathered in from the mountain pastures, for distribution to their respective owners. The Ölfusá is formed by the junction of the Sog, the fisherman's paradise, which drains Thingvalla Lake, with the Hvítá, or White River, whose name reveals its glacial origin. The denser mud from the Lángjökull, whence it proceeds, is caught in the Hvítárvatn, which clears it almost as much as the Lake of Geneva does the Rhone. Salmon abound herein, so much so, that one of its tributaries is called the Laxá, or Salmon River. In the angle between the Hvítá and the Brúará, at the foot of another stretch of bogland, lie the little church and cottage or two that constitute the present Skálholt. For nearly eight hundred years, from 1000 to 1797, this was the seat of the southern bishopric, in the latter year united to that of Hólar, and then transferred to Reykjavík. Looking east from the little rising ground on which the church is built, the prospect is a pleasant one, for the warm brown tufa hills across the Hvítá form a happy contrast with the greenery of the pastures; and, beyond all, the snows of Hekla and the distant Jökulls add to the picturesqueness of the view.



ICELANDIC BRIDAL DRESS.

Before crossing the Ölfusá at Laugardælir we stayed for coffee at the doctor's house. Here again were flowers in dining-room and salon; music, moreover, and a piano! And quite as strange, a little garden, wherein our genial host had planted several specimens of mountain ash and other trees. He fears the wind, which tears the rootlets from their hold, especially when

frost and thaw have loosened everything. The passage of the river resembled the crossing of the Thjórsá, except that no sandbanks intervened. The current is deep and rapid, and though at first our oarsmen pulled up stream, the boat was soon swept down again. Now, however, the march of progress has replaced the cumbrous ferry by a suspension bridge, 'Young Iceland's' pride—over the opening of which in 1891 arose so natural a jubilation. The event has been commemorated in an ode by Hannes Hafstein, one of the coming writers of this poetic land.

The Althing of 1891, moreover, voted a sum exceeding £3800 for improving the means of communication, so that bridges may soon be found on all the larger western rivers. Then the romance of travel must seek a refuge among the rushing torrents, the quicksand deserts, and the old-time homesteads of the wild primeval south.

While waiting for the re-saddling of our ponies, we were much amused by the antics of a raven and a dog. It seems that a standing feud exists between them everywhere; and little wonder, if they always tease each other as these two did. First the bird would slowly sail to a hillock crest, a few yards ahead of the quadruped, who would quietly follow in an uninterested and disconnected sort of fashion, till within jumping distance. Meanwhile the bird, in utter obliviousness of his approach, would discursively peck and play about till its wolfish-looking foe prepared for a sudden spring, and simultaneously would rise to an inch or so above the nose of the disappointed dog, whose sudden interest in the hillock was quite as funny as the raven's languid 'caw.'

The river is famous for its salmon fishery—let to a southern merchant as a rule. The fish are said to ascend the stream as far as the base of the Gullfoss, notwithstanding the mixture of glacier mud. Soon after quitting its banks we find a causeway of turf that leads across a marsh. On the right is a range of tufa hills with basalt dykes at intervals, not unlike the walls that bound the farms among Welsh or Cumbrian hills. The first of the summits is Ingólfsfjall, the burial-place of the pioneer to whose superstition the capital owes its odd location. An hour or so, and long white curls of steam which the wind drives down the valley announce the springs of Reykir. They occur on each side of a pretty stream bearing the suggestive and appropriate name of Varmá.

By far the greater number are found on the right-hand side of the stream as we look up the glen towards the hills, which hide the beetling crags around the upper group in Hengill. Nearly a hundred years ago, Sir John Stanley counted a hundred springs, and the number is not much less at present, though the power and force which he describes have considerably declined. But the immense variety of the weird, uncanny things is a never-ending source of interest. Here, in its bed among the stones, lies the 'Little Geysir,' no longer leaping thirty feet into the air, but the

marvel is none the less of its seething, bubbling basin, several feet across, in which, every few minutes, the commotion increases and grows until a bright clear jet of boiling water rises some five or six feet in height, while clouds of pure white steam, the evident power beneath, escape from their prison house. The accounts of travellers vary as much as the springs themselves. Some one to-morrow may have to wait, possibly hours, for an eruption, and then see a finer one by far. Higher up the valley is another, whose jets are caught by an overhanging rock and scattered in fan-like spray. Beyond is a third, a miniature rock-filled cavern wherein no water appears, but from which a jet of steam is constantly blowing off with a hissing, rushing blast. Another constantly simmers in quiet contentment at adding its steady quota to the bulk of the stream below, and the lovely blue of its beautiful basin makes up for the lack of explosion. The incrusted deposits from others form a totally different attraction. Plainly, the palagonite beds are being slowly but surely dissolved by the gaseous flow from beneath, and here, on the edge of a fountain, a cream-coloured coronet, tinted with pink, is forming from out of the calcareous solution. Sometimes, where no spring whatever exists, the ground is smoking away, as it changes into a bluish or yellowish clay. Sulphur occurs here and there, but the quantity produced is exceedingly small.

Hoping, if possible, to cross to the Lake of Thingvalla, I asked for a guide, but none could be found. However, a woman declared that one might be had from a farm a mile or two higher up, and, leaping astride a sturdy nag, she proceeded to show the way. We arrived at the farm, but the man was away, and would not return till too late to enter the wild ravines beyond. I was sorry, because I had heard of their beauty, and knew that they were seldom traversed. But, for compensation, there came an examination of several played-out fountain beds. The colours of these are brightest of all where the old clay crust has dried and crumbled, the reds, and whites, and pinks and yellows of the variegated sinter are heaped in many a brilliant pile, set off by the restful green of the grassy banks above. Throughout the valley, care is needed, lest an over-adventurous wanderer should find the crust give way beneath him and lead to a scalding foot-bath.

I stayed at the farm, though the reeking damp of its little room exceeded by far anything I had seen elsewhere; but somehow one cares for little here. The crystal air and the constant change permit one to do what at home would never be dreamt of. I have nothing to say, in consequence, of the charges at the Reykir farm, which some have complained of. The woman who brought me thence asked little enough for her guidance.

The distance from Reykir to Reykjavík, some thirty miles, may be covered in six or seven hours, though more are often consumed. Directly the river is crossed the steep ascent begins to the plateau of Hellisheithi.

Ascent and plateau alike are completely covered with lava, reminding us of the Skaptá stream in its savage sharp grotesqueness. Here are great piles of dead-black cindery stuff, full of little round holes, which often are lined with a red deposit. There are masses of clinker with smooth red calcined face, like a badly over-burnt brick, while others resemble the glass furnace slag which gardeners use for rock-work. Up through the chaos of beaks and claws and paws that spirted out of the incandescent heaps, we follow a winding path. True, a road has been built of lava blocks, but the ponies prefer the older track, for the steep hill-side at any rate. South-west are the craters from whence proceeded the stream announced in the Althing when the fate of heathendom hung in the balance. North lie the Hengill Springs, chalybeate, silicious, carbon and sulphur, quotes Lock; to develop perchance, some day, as the Hengill Spa!



REYKJAVÍK HARBOUR.

At the Heithi end comes a sharp descent of several hundred feet to the southern end of Mosfellsheithi. There are lava streams here innumerable, but mostly of great antiquity; in places grown over by moss or grass. It frequently seems that these do not wait for the lava to decompose, they rather find lodgment in hollows and clefts where sand and dust have gathered. Dome-like bubbles on either hand are numerous hereabout. The hardening crust, from four to six inches thick, confined the rising gases until they forced it bodily up.

Away to the west is the sea again, and the spit of lava where the

capital lies jutting out into Faxa Fjörthr. To the right are the Mosfells, and beneath lie plovers and ptarmigan waiting for sportsmen. An hour or two more, and the craters of Rautholar are passed on our left. The road lengthens out, and the ponies get tired, but the Laxá (the Laxey of the Isle of Man) appears in due time with its salmon weir up on the left. Four to five hundred pounds weight are sometimes secured here at a single draw. Three miles more and the dingy wooden houses of Reykjavík—Smokewich, or Steambay—heave in sight, extended along the desolate slope which fringes the somewhat exposed roadstead, called by courtesy the harbour. The road develops into a street, with gutters and footpaths, which we follow almost to the end of the town. Then, turning to the left, a good cross road conducts us in less than a hundred yards to the Hotel Reykjavík, the first of its kind encountered in our ride of nearly four hundred miles from the little inn at Seythisfjörthr. Here we found rooms both upstairs and down, large and airy, in striking contrast with some of our recent resting-places. At the time of this visit the genial English-speaking hostess was Húsfrú Zoëga, whose husband is one of a well-known Reykjavík clan. Thorthr, another of them, lives in a neat little home in Vesturgötu, above the fishers' quarter on the west, and ranks as chief among the growing corps of guides. He, when I called upon him for a chat, got his wife to wear her wedding-dress of dark embroidered stuff, with the old-fashioned horn-like snowy *faldr* or headdress, into which the still more ancient cap developed. There are many guides about the town who only know the tourist route to Geysir, and perhaps to Hekla, but Zoëga is well acquainted with the island as a whole; and there are a few more whose experience is also fairly comprehensive. In any case a traveller should have a clearly understood and written-out agreement, embracing every possible detail, before concluding any bargain. Most of the guides have an inclination towards a huge and cumbrous caravan, which is totally unnecessary, and only serves to frighten people from Icelandic travel. Should ponies have been bought, it is equally unnecessary now to sacrifice them for a sixth of what they cost, as travellers occasionally have done. For example, a pack-horse for which I gave £5 10*s.* I sold *to an exporter* for £3; and a riding-horse costing £8 6*s.* 8*d.* realised in England £12, but the carriage exceeded £6, much of which, however, accrued on English railways.

The town of Reykjavík consists of three main streets, which run from east to west, or perhaps, more strictly speaking, north-west to south-east, with three or four cross roads. Upon its black sand beach of powdered lava are two or three small piers of stone or wood, leading to the first of these main streets, a more or less disreputable affair, as coast roads are apt to be. Here, heaps of heavy merchandise, with groups of loafers hanging round, there a bed of stones covered with drying fish; between, the usual plots of waste, neglected ground, that made Miss Oswald want to

do a bit of tidying up. The next main avenue is better. Here and in the cross roads are stores, and shops, and dwelling-houses, not always easily to be distinguished from each other, for while some of the former do display the usual 'signs,' others are quite without. Here, too, is another hotel, the Ísland, and several of the houses of the guides, where accommodation may be had. Beyond lies the Athalstræti, wherein are found the Reykjavík Hotel, and the more important buildings of the town, or should we call it city! for we come at once upon the cathedral of the island diocese. To the right of it stands the Althing Hús, the substantial House of Parliament. In front of these there lies a little square of grass, with monuments to Thorwaldsen and Pietursson; the post office, and a consular house or two. A little streamlet flowing from a lake above the town, the skating pond of winter time, intersects the site, and on the rising ground beyond it eastward are the Latin School, the observatory, the windmill, and, nearer to the sea, the governor's house and a straggling line of smaller buildings, along the road by which we entered.



In the Main Street of Reykjavík.

West of the lake is the cemetery, reached by the western cross road, which serves as promenade. Here, too, are several private houses and attempts at market gardens. Not a few of the fishers' cots have gardens also, wherein do grow potatoes, turnips, carrots, some struggling specimens of cabbages, and more successful currants, whose little bright-red bunches make happy contrast with the catchflys, lupins, and such other homely flowers as one finds around an English country cottage. In some of the better gardens, rhubarb and radishes are grown, and in a sheltered corner stand a specimen or two of mountain ash, some nine or ten feet high.

The population, which numbered less than five hundred a century ago, has increased considerably since the abolition of the trade monopoly in 1856, though principally since 1874, the year of partial independence; and most of all within the last decade. It now amounts to about three thousand seven hundred, composed in great part, as regards the merchants, of Danes, while most of the officials, and of course the fishermen, are natives. There

is growing up as well a race of native merchants; but notwithstanding this, the country people still regard the capital as a Danish, not an Icelandic town. The houses are mostly built of wood, painted a dirty brown, or tarred. A few are white, and some are faced, or roofed, with corrugated iron. The general effect is far from picturesque. The bleakness of the situation is, of course, unalterable, but Norwegians would have made variety with brightly-coloured houses, if nothing else could be accomplished. Perhaps the green roofs of the fishers' cots are most attractive, or would be so, were it not for the evil odours proceeding from the decomposing bits of fish which lie about beneath them. A contributory cause of the air of general neglect, is doubtless the practice of so many merchants, who make their real homes in Copenhagen, and only visit Iceland in the summer.



GOVERNOR'S HOUSE, REYKJAVÍK.

With the advent of the native merchant, however, even this is being somewhat overcome. His difficulty lies in want of capital. Depressed by years of Papal servitude, and crushed by those relentless regulations as to trade which even Danes themselves admit to be one cause of his misfortunes, the Icelander has frequently lost heart, and learnt to live a life of dull submission. Some have sought a refuge in emigration, mainly to Canada, and the population of the island, which a few years ago almost reached 72,000, fell in 1888 to 69,244, raised, however, in 1890 to 70,240. Professor Pouchet says: 'This means depopulation within two or three centuries. It is possible to foresee a time when Iceland and the other northern lands of Europe will have scarcely any permanent inhabitants. Southerners alone will gather there throughout the summer, to fish in those prolific seas, and to depart, with the birds, at the approach of winter. It is a contingency which we are not bound to contemplate, but one can easily admit that the governments of the future may have to face it, unless some scientific discovery, some economic transformation, should occur, to effect a change in the conditions of the struggle for existence in the countries of the extreme North.'

This is dreadful; but is it necessary? Remedies suggest themselves at once. The drainage of the marshes, the levelling and enlargement of the tuns, or home-fields, so that a man may mow in half-an-hour what now

takes half-a-day, and the reclamation of untended valleys. These done, an immediate multiplication in the number of cattle maintainable would take place, and if cleanliness were but made compulsory in native dairies, their produce would speedily find its way into the waiting markets of the South. An even more immediate effect would follow the application of the principles of co-operation to the conduct of trade, and to the reaping of a vastly increased share of the boundless harvest of the sea. The position of the island is specially favourable, since it stands at the very portal of the Polar Seas, from which proceeds so great a portion of the food which the denizens of the deep require. Let these be linked with the regulation, or better still, the extinction, of the liquor traffic, especially that in beer and spirits; and a genuine national turning unto Him from whom all blessings flow, and the pessimistic picture of Iceland's dismal future will fade at once before the brightening gleams of the better time that's coming.



THE CATHEDRAL AND PARLIAMENT HOUSE, REYKJAVÍK.

But we must examine somewhat more closely the principal buildings. The church is fairly lofty, substantially erected, but plain, and certainly not able to contain above a fifth of the population; from whence it appears that attendance at public worship is not as general as in many a country parish; but that is a difference not confined to Iceland. Some gaudy robes are preserved as relics of the past. The font is pointed out, a gift to Iceland from Thorwaldsen, as an inscription testifies:—'*Opus hoc Romæ fecit et islandiæ, terræ sibi gentiliacæ, pietatis causa donavit Albertus Thorwaldsen. —Anno mdcccxxvii.*' The Icelanders are mightily proud of 'our only sculptor,' though the possession was but indirect, for, according to tradition, his birthplace was the North Atlantic, somewhere between Reykjavík and Copenhagen, where he landed in 1770. His father was a wood-carver, and, so far as that branch of the art is concerned, Iceland even now is not without exponents of the craft. Young Thorwaldsen began with figure-heads for ships, but having gained a gold medal at the Copenhagen

Academy of Arts, and a scholarship entitling him to three years' study in a foreign land, he betook himself to Rome. The time was nearly up when a work of his, 'Jason with the golden fleece,' was seen and praised by Canova, and bought by Mr. Hope in 1803. This was the turning-point in fortune's tide for him. He remained in Rome for sixteen years, and then returned to Denmark overland, received with honour even in Northern Italy and Germany. A considerable amount of work was done for the palace of Christiansborg, but the climate not agreeing with him he returned to Rome. He died in 1844, most of his personal estate being left to establish a museum in the Danish capital, wherein a number of his works are now preserved. Some of the better known are 'Christ,' 'Christ and the Apostles,' 'Night and Day.' Nor must the famous 'Lion of Lucerne' be forgotten, that noble tribute to the brave Swiss guard that fell at the Tuileries, which Mr. Ball describes as 'perhaps the most appropriate and touching monument in existence,' for the colossal lion, 'dying of its wounds, yet seeking to defend a shield which bears the Bourbon lilies,' was executed after the designs of Thorwaldsen. Of his character, apparently the less one says the better. Licentiousness, intemperance, and jealousy, to a greater or a less degree, are charges brought against him. Art and piety may often go together, but the first is not the second, nor does it of its own accord produce it.



THE STATUE OF CHRIST, BY THORWALDSEN.

Since the abolition of the bishoprics of Hólar and of Skálholt, the primate of the island has resided in the capital. His revenues amount to four or five hundred pounds per annum. Next come forty deans, responsible for the welfare of their districts, which contain in all about two hundred and ninety parishes. The incomes of the pastors are very limited, although they sometimes have two or more churches each; they are often 'passing rich on forty pounds a year,' and many have to be content with less, but

each one has a farm, and a certain amount of stock is given him when he enters upon his work. This state of affairs is not without its benefits. It is manifest that a pastor subjected thus to share his people's labours, failures, and successes, must have a keener bond of sympathetic feeling than one removed entirely from their sphere. And as the parishioners themselves are educated men, it follows that to stand above them and command respect, the attainments of the pastor must not be inconsiderable. This, in addition to traditional love of learning, will throw some light upon the causes of the high standard that obtains. Candidates are educated first at the Latin School for five or six years, and then in the Theological College, both of these institutions being situated at Reykjavík. Some afterwards proceed to Copenhagen for further study at the University. There is a medical school for those adopting that profession, and not a few young Icelanders proceed to Denmark for the study of the law.



THE LION OF LUCERNE, BY THORWALDSEN.

The Latin School, where the groundwork of these careers is laid, stands in a prominent position upon the hill eastward from the town. It is a plain white building, bare without, and far from anything luxurious within, but well equipped with an excellent teaching staff. Its library contains seven thousand volumes. Dr. Olsen is classical tutor, and to his knowledge of Latin, Hebrew, Greek, and Sanscrit, unites a wide and accurate acquaintance with the languages of modern Europe. With true Icelandic thirst for information, he has visited the famous scenes of Greek and Roman history, photographs of which adorn his study walls.

Of organised elementary education there is none, nor is it in the least required. The mothers teach their children to read and write, and, with the fathers' aid, a knowledge of general history and geography is often added. The whole is superintended by the pastor, who gives what more may be desired. There are one or two high schools, and at Akureyri, a kind of modern side college, under the care of Dr. Hjaltalin. Good private schools exist in the larger settlements.

The influence of the Lutheran Church is practically universal, the nonconformists of the island numbering probably but one or two adherents of the Brethren, and a single Swedenborgian. Church matters recall Paijkull's

story about the famous Icelandic bishop and his children. The prelate one day appeared before a certain Danish queen, who kindly asked him how many such he had, '*Wie viele Kinder haben sie?*'

'Nine hundred, your majesty,' replied the bishop.

'It must cost a great deal to feed so many,' surmised the somewhat dubious queen.

'Not very much, your majesty; they feed themselves in summer, and before the winter comes a third are killed and eaten!' To comprehend the story it must be known that *Kindr* is one of the Icelandic names for sheep!

The Parliament House is a building without any pretension to architectural beauty, though the substantial stone walls and roof, very wisely made to project slightly beyond them, give an air of permanence, which distinguishes it from surrounding edifices. Over the door is a carved gerfalcon, the national emblem of Iceland, and above, the cipher of the King of Denmark alternates with the arms of Reykjavík, a salted cod-fish surmounted by a crown. There are two chambers, plain, square rooms, accommodating the Upper House, of a dozen members, six chosen by the Lower, and six by the King; and the Lower, or House of Commons, numbering twenty-four. All members receive their travelling expenses, and six kroner a day during the session of Parliament, which occupies two months every second year.

Within the same building are housed the museum, in the upper storey, and the public library on the ground floor. Unfortunately, most of the archæological treasures of Iceland were exported, before the establishment of these excellent institutions, some to founder at sea, some to perish by fire in Copenhagen itself; the most part, however, to enrich the collections of the Danish capital. There still remain most interesting examples of ancient native workmanship, in wood, and gold, and silver. Many specimens of the latter fell into the hands of early travellers, but little now remains, except in the homes of better families, and naturally they retain their heirlooms; brooches and belts, chains and necklaces, horn mounts and snuff-boxes. Of course the guides and others can always offer something! The library contains 25,000 printed books and 1300 manuscripts—the earliest dating from the thirteenth century. Books may be bought at forty or fifty of the stores and better homesteads in the island, and manuscripts are not infrequent in country parsonages, though few lay claim to much antiquity, many being the work of patient students, who have enshrined their thoughts in words, well knowing that poverty would prevent their publication.

And what of the inner life of Reykjavík? Within these wooden shells, comfort, and even luxury, may not unfrequently be found. Indeed, the aim of many is to reproduce Copenhagen, indoors at any rate. And deeper still? Here the accounts of travellers coincide remarkably, in representing a state of affairs almost inseparable, apparently, from settlement life throughout

the world. Mackenzie's detailed picture may in some respects be modified, and Henderson's dark cloud receive a gleam or two of silver lining, but the Vanity Fair of Reykjavík is not closed yet. Not to an Englishman, however, is it permissible to dwell upon this mote within his brother's eye.

Whatever the town itself may be, the outlook northward is superb.



WOMEN WASHING CLOTHES IN THE HOT SPRING NEAR REYKJAVÍK.

Over the white horses that cap the waves of Faxa Fjörthr, there shines in bright unsullied purity the crystal cone of Snæfells Jökull. Rising abruptly from the water's edge, at the very extremity of the bay, to a height of 4710 feet, it seems to be almost at hand, so far does the startling clearness of the northern atmosphere proceed towards the annihilation of seventy miles between. Ten miles away, north-east, the heavy mass of Esja overlooks the group of islands dotting the intervening sea, while even southward

the jagged pinnacles of the Gullbríngu Sýsla hills break the monotony of the ever-present lava. There is not much of special interest in the vicinity, except the colonies of eider ducks upon the islets in the offing, and the hot spring, from the steam of which the town received its name. This lies some two miles to the east, on the border of a little stream, where women wash their clothes. As we return along the Austurstræti, we shall see 'The Printing Smithy of Ísafold,' the beauty of the workmanship of which surpasses that of many an English press.

Before we quit the town, a glance at Icelandic trade may not be out of place. In 1889 the exports reached a nominal amount of £333,000. This exceeds the actual value, as Mr. Sim has shown, because the barter system yet applied to some of the articles places a fictitious price upon them, in exchange for equally high-priced imports. Foremost, of course, are the products of the fisheries, comprising 14,800,000 lbs. of dried cod, haddock, and ling; 4000 barrels of shark oil, and an unspecified quantity of whale products, not very important perhaps then, but rapidly extending since. With these may be classed 6400 lbs. of eider down, and 12,000 of 'feathers,' probably puffin. The value of the sheep is manifest in an export of 60,000 animals, 600,000 lbs. of salt mutton, 20,000 skins, and 2,000,000 lbs. of wool. Mittens and stockings, salmon and ptarmigan, moss and sulphur add their share. Corn-stuffs, rye, etc., take precedence among the imports, amounting to 10,971,000 lbs., followed by 1,025,000 lbs. of sugar, 440,000 of coffee, and 190,000 of chicory; 55,000 gallons of petroleum, and 4500 tons of coal, for light and heat, 46,000 barrels of salt, and 55,000 lbs. of ropes and lines for the fish; 133,000 lbs. of tobacco is a doubtful quantity; 16,000 gallons of beer, and, worst of all, 42,000 gallons of spirits must stand for so much waste.



THINGVELLIR PLAINS, WHERE THE ANCIENT ICELANDIC PARLIAMENT MET.



ICELANDIC FUEL—PEAT.

CHAPTER VII.

THINGVELLIR AND GEYSIR

WE are now on the threshold of a district the very name of which will recall the memories of the past to many a traveller, who, in the interval between the arrival and departure of a steamer, has become an antiquarian on the Lögberg, or an amateur navvy in Haukadalr. The journey from Granton to Geysir and Hekla and back may be accomplished in three weeks, nine days being allowed in Iceland. Sometimes twelve days are given, and then Njal's country and Krísuvík may be included. The interminable delays which exasperated the travellers of half a century ago no longer tax the patience of Geysir parties; still, it is advisable to write a mail beforehand, and so insure attention. Reykjavík may await our return, for there is a delightful uncertainty about Icelandic travel which adds piquancy to the expedition, and to keep a day in hand is always wise. Half-a-dozen straps will not be out of place, and if the visitor be not at home on horseback, a sheepskin over the saddle will earn his gratitude ere long.

The distance to Thingvellir is five-and-thirty miles, though miles form a doubtful index to the length of an Icelandic day's march. For ten of these we keep to the Reykir road, already traversed, meeting at intervals

a train of ponies lumbering portward with their loads of produce from th valley farms, or a group of Icelanders careering coastward, pounding the ponies' sides at every step. Upon the farm the rider does it to keep h feet warm, and at last the animal comes to look upon it as the prop thing, and is somewhat at a loss without the constant kicking.

After crossing the lava plain, where many a pretty floweret, and mar a delicate spike of grass, or tuft of moss rewards a search, howev superficial, the track leads up the steep ascent to Mosfellsheithi. A heig of about one thousand feet is soon attained, and an undulating plateau li



THINGVALLA LAKE.

before us. The trend is downwards, and soon the wilderness of wild chaot rockland gives way to one of grassy grave-like hummocks, where the ponie feet have deepened the wind-frost-bitten gashes into veritable trenches. long-legged rider may have some trouble here, unless he looks ahead an learns to 'ware the hillocks. The ladies have the easiest task, for the little footboards keep them clear. A road, however, is being made, whic possibly will reach to Geysir some day. Presently, through gorges on ou right, the placid waters of Thingvallavatn, the second largest lake i Iceland, come in sight, with the black crater mouths of Sandey and

Nesey peering up as islands. In an hour the first of Iceland's 'lions' suddenly appears, and the traveller finds himself upon the verge of the world-renowned Almannagjá, or All-men's-rift, a chasm 180 feet in depth. Before him lies a mighty lava-stream that was old a thousand years ago. In prehistoric time it poured, a molten flood, from Skjaldbreith in a stream some five or six miles wide, right into the lake beneath us; and afterwards the centre sank, breaking away from the portions on each side, and forming here this jagged rent, and a corresponding crack, the Hrafnagjá, or Raven's rift, across the valley. How the sinking came about is one of the many problems in this northern wonderland which half a score of travellers have determined in half a score of ways, to say nothing of the rest, who keep their counsel to themselves. Probably a combination of their theories may bring us near the truth, namely, that the liquid lava did flow on after the crust had cooled; but that the contour of the valley determined the course these rifts pursued, while earthquake or upheaval produced or opened up the other cracks which intersect the central mass.



THE FALLS OF ÖXARÁ.

But the natural interest of the spot, however great, is small compared with the halo of historic glory which surrounds the Thingfields. Let us descend the craggy pathway to the grassy moat-like bottom of the rift. Half a mile beyond, the Öxará leaps down the rock wall in a clear transparent waterfall, and dashes on among the boulders which have been piled up within the rift. Here the inner wall has been disrupted, and the river foams among the débris, until it plunges into a dark, still pool, in the dismal depths of which women who had slain their children met their doom. Fording the river, we find ourselves upon the plain itself. It is mostly overspread with a cushion of soft grey moss, while little shrubberies of not unfragrant birch, or willow bushes, rising sometimes to three or four feet high, are dotted up and down—where in unfrequented corners plover, ptarmigan, and curlew may be found. To the right is the little church and home farm of Thingvellir, with the reputed 'measure stone,' on which are

lines supposed to have been the 'standards' of the olden time. But the interest centres in a green spot, the summit of a lava wall a hundred yards or so in length, and only a few paces wide. On either side are rifts from ten to twenty feet in width, the Flosagjá and the Nikolásagjá, uniting at the northern end, and almost meeting at the southern, where a little rocky isthmus leads between them to the ancient forum of Icelandic eloquence. Here, in palmy days of liberty, and in stirring times of strife, the doomsmen sat in safety, and, from a little rising ground at the northern limit of the space—the actual Lögsberg—new laws were promulgated, and old ones recapitulated, while the 'masses' lined the outer edges of the chasms. In these, the deep blue water that finds its way among the lava caverns lies



ALMANNAGJÁ AT THINGVELLIR.

thirty feet beneath. Here, in 928, the Althing was established; in 1000, the semi-Pagan, semi-Christian creed of Popery was accepted; and in 1262, the Act of Union with Norway, with all the train of miseries which followed, when Danish hands secured the helm. But here, in 1873, there met a band of delegates, who bound themselves to gain, at least, self-government. The pith of the matter lay in the question whether Iceland was to be subject to the Rigsdag, or only to acknowledge the Danish king as hers.

The delegates had a noble leader in Jón Sigurthsson, whose massive face and form benignantly look down to-day from many a homestead wall. Born in 1811, he became secretary of the Icelandic Literary Society in 1840, and five years later entered the invertebrate assembly then marking time at Reykjavík. In 1847 he became its president, and in 1874 the

resolution of the delegates, the life-work of Jón Sigurthsson, and the wisdom of Christian IX., King of Denmark, brought forth the constitution granted in person by his Majesty upon this classic spot on August 7. A record of the visit remains inscribed upon a huge stone block. The rejoicings took the true Icelandic form of ode and song, and something stronger.

Matthias Jochumsson wrote the King's Welcome, which Bayard Taylor has translated, of which a verse or two only can be quoted :—

'Land's father here the Law-mount view,
Behold God's works in all their vastness!
Where saw'st thou Freedom's fairer fastness,
With fire-heaved ramparts, waters blue?
Here sprang the Sagas of our splendour:
Here every Iceland heart is tender:
God built this altar for His flock:

Here as in thousand years of old,
Sound the same words, a voice unended,
As when their life and law defended
The spearmen with their shields of gold:
The same land yet the same speech giveth,
The ancient soul of Freedom liveth,
And hither, King, we welcome thee!

But now are past a thousand years,
As in the people's memory hoarded,
And in God's volume stand recorded
Their strife and trial, woes and fears;
Now let the hope of better ages
Be what thy presence, King, presages,
Now let the prosperous time be sure!'

A stage of five-and-thirty miles leads on to Haukadalr. At first the track proceeds across the remnant of the lava plain, and up the solidified waves which, parting, formed the Raven's Rift. Higher still, and a ridge of volcanic ash and scoria is encountered, with beds of soft brown and yellow tufa, wherein are caves capacious enough to act as natural sheepfolds. From the summit the triple cones of Hekla may be seen, forty miles away, south-east. And then the path leads down into the fertile vale of Laugardalr, a kind of half-way house. Here are a couple of lakes, and a preface to Geysir in the shape of a few hot springs, from which ascend great white steam columns. Here the Southern Icelanders were comfortably 'dipped' in flocks, nearly nine hundred years ago, and so converted into Christians wholesale, just as Augustine drove the Kentish Saxons through the watercourse, and introduced his Christianity for a season. 'Hugging the feet of the mountains,' says Forbes, 'we pushed rapidly on; at one moment our ponies were up to their knees in the tall grass of the rich, lawn-like meadows, then we crossed the stony bed of a torrent on its way

to mingle with the lake, or floundered through the edges of the morass; farm succeeded farm in rapid succession: in the numerous sheltered nooks cattle and horses were abundant, and peace and plenty seemed to reign in this, one of the best dairy districts in the island. But now the Brúará stops the way; foaming and snorting, it hurries along through a lovely glen, where dwarf birch and willow and extensive patches of heather and moss have established themselves on the decomposed surface of an old lava field.'

At the point where the river is crossed, a rift has opened in mid-stream. Into this the waters pour, and so reduce the depth on either side. The



CROSSING THE BRÚARÁ RIVER.

ponies dash through the shallows till they reach the rift, which is crossed by a wooden bridge.

In a couple of hours, the shoulder of the last hill is turned, and there heaves in view the goal of many a pilgrimage, the patch of parti-coloured silicious deposit, some four or five square miles in size, over which Geysir exercises still undoubted though diminished sway. Earliest known among such displays, it is little wonder that the native name of this particular spring should have become of universal application. Tents are usually pitched on a piece of greensward a hundred yards south of the steadily increasing mound which encloses the famous basin, unless indeed, as is often the case, quarters have been secured at one of the farms in the neighbourhood.

The mound itself rises about six feet above the level of the lower

slopes of Laugafell, on which it is situated. Its surface is corrugated like that of an oyster shell by repeated waves of deposit, and its centre consists of a saucer-like depression fifty or sixty feet in diameter, usually filled to the brim with hot, but not boiling, water. In the centre of the basin is the tube, eight or nine feet in diameter and seventy in depth, the seat of the wonderful phenomena so often described, so seldom realised. Lord Dufferin says: 'The usual subterranean thunders had already commenced. A violent agitation was disturbing the centre of the pool. Suddenly a dome of water lifted itself up to the height of eight or ten feet, then burst and fell, immediately after which a shining liquid column, or rather a sheaf of columns, wreathed in robes of vapour, sprung into the air, and in a succession of jerking leaps, each higher than the last, flung their silver crests against the sky. For a few minutes the fountain held its own, then all at once appeared to lose its ascending energy. The unstable waters faltered, drooped, fell—like a broken purpose—back upon themselves, and were immediately sucked down into the recesses of the pipe.'

The height to which the column rises in its finest displays is about a hundred feet, which is considerably less than that attained a century ago, while the subordinate jets may average thirty to fifty feet. There does not, however, appear to be so much diminution in the beauty of the larger outbursts, when they do occur, as in their frequency. At the beginning of the present century, one might be counted upon within thirty hours, and often several took place during that time; but now, several days may elapse without any other sign than subterranean thunderings and abortive explosions. It appears that fine weather is most propitious, the reason probably being that on cold, and especially windy days, the upper layers of waters are too rapidly cooled.

Compensation, however, may be had from a neighbouring spring of more recent date, surnamed Strokkr, or Churn. Here the escaping steam keeps the water in constant ebullition, and if a few pieces of turf be thrown in, so as to choke the tube, a jet almost, if not quite, equal to that of Geysir may be produced—and fortunately Strokkr, 'like the stormy petrel, exults in the tempest.'

Many and various have been the speculations as to the causes of these magnificent displays. For a long time it was taken for granted that subterranean reservoirs must exist, partly filled with water, which was driven out at intervals by the concentrated force of steam. Professor Bunsen, however, who spent eleven days in making observations here, has shown that there is no such necessity, but that all the phenomena of the eruption may be explained by the relation of the temperature to the pressure in the tube itself. From about 185 degrees Fahrenheit at the surface, the temperature increases, until at sixty feet below—that is, near the bottom of the tube—it is found to stand at 268 degrees, or fifty-six above boiling

point; yet, owing to the enormous pressure of the water column, bubbling or formation of steam within the water is prevented, until the upper layers of water become heated to the boiling point. Then they are driven upwards, and so remove the pressure from the hotter layers immediately below, which instantly burst into violent ebullition also, and so from layer to layer the diminution of the pressure proceeds, allowing each succeeding layer to add its quota of suddenly formed and superheated steam, and consequent upheaving power, to that just freed above, until the multiplied force of the whole would be sufficient, according to Bunsen, to drive the column to a height of 3000 feet, if concentrated on a single jet. But as the lower portions rise they are met and beaten down by the descending masses of the earlier upheavals, which also condense the propelling vapour to some extent, and so by another of Nature's compensating processes, while we lose the bomb-like shot of a single jet, we gain the glorious spectacle of the clashing conflict and the long duration of the grand display. That the force of the explosion is thus transmitted to, and concentrated in, the upper layers, Bunsen further proved by suspending stones in the tube at various depths, when only those suspended near the surface ever reached an elevation of over 100 feet; while those placed deep in the tube never exhibited themselves at all.

In the case of the Strokkr, matters are altogether different. Its aperture is a funnel decreasing in width, until at a depth of twenty-six feet it is only eight or ten inches in diameter. The lower portion of this funnel is always filled with an ascending column of steam, which keeps the water in constant ebullition, and which, when interrupted by the usual dose of turf, gains force enough to drive the water in the upper portion of the funnel to a height approaching that of Geysir itself. But it must ever be inferior in grandeur, since the diameter of the jet is so much smaller. Still it affords a spectacle of rare beauty. Bunsen says: 'The deafening hissing and roaring that accompany the eruption of the jets of water from the crater of the springs, in which one may distinctly hear the rushing of the masses of water, which fall in torrents, and are beaten to foam by the force of the vapours—the dazzling rainbows, which are formed with varying brilliancy from the reflection of the solar rays amid the pearly drops of the rushing cascades, and as rapidly disappear beneath the overwhelming mass of vapours—the dense clouds, which, rising from the waterspouts, are made the sport of the winds as they stand out in bold relief from the dark wall of rock behind them, all combine to excite in the mind of the traveller an indescribable sensation of sublime grandeur.'

But whence proceeds the heat itself? Apparently from the uprush of alkaline and weaker acid vapours from below, which decompose the palagonite soil, and so set up an action of which a further rise in temperature is one result. And even the graceful sinter ledges, the delicate

petrifactions, and the lovely coronets of the springs themselves, are but deposits of the silica and carbonates, dissolved or formed by the passage of the gas and water through the decomposing rock. Besides the two great orifices, there are many other jets or pools, one of which is famous for the intensely blue tint of its waters, which lie in a basin fantastically fringed and lined with pure white silica.

Five or six miles south-east of Geysir lies one of the grandest waterfalls in Iceland, the fine, though seldom visited, Gullfoss, so called from the golden colour of the water in the Hvítá. In comparing it with its rival



THE CRATER OF GEYSIR.

the Dettifoss, Mr. Lock considers that 'it is superior as regards the volume of water, but inferior on the score of depth.' He tells us how the river, 500 yards in width, becomes contracted to 300, at a point where it descends in a series of cascades, in all, perhaps, forty feet in depth. Then comes a reach, wherein the flood prepares for its awful plunge into a V-shaped cleft. A rocky islet in the reach, ending at the angle of the V, divides the current, which, in two arms, one hundred feet in width and eighty in depth at the lowest part, is hurled into the gloomy chasm, scarce ten feet wide at the bottom. Here 'the imprisoned torrent foams and plunges with

maddened rage 'twixt towering buttresses of palagonite and basaltic lava,' which at one point approach so closely, that it seems almost impossible for any but a subterranean exit to exist. Yet 'it is possible to scramble down to the level of the stream, whence a good view can be obtained.'

A somewhat kindred region, known in the elegant but expressive description of Mr. Forbes as 'the congealed Pandemonium,' is the central district of the Gullbríngu Sýsla, or Gold-bringing country, which occupies the horn-like promontory forming the south-western corner of Iceland. It derives its more attractive native name from the swarms of fish which everywhere abound in the neighbourhood of its barren and desolate shores. It disputes with Arnes Sýsla, in which are Thingvellir and Geysir, the honour of being the most earthquake-damaged, lava-ridden fragment of the island, except, perhaps, the devastated ruins of the Skaptá, and the eastern interior. It is true that Arnes Sýsla can claim the total subversion of sixty-nine farms, and the damage of three hundred more in 1784, but the Pandemonium gains in the frequency of its upheaving disturbances, and the ferocity of its solidified clinker.

The most famous spot within its limits is Krísuvík, with its Brennisteinnámar, or sulphur mines. Although comparatively close to the southern shore, it is best reached from Reykjavík. The track leads first to Hafnarfjörthr, where, for once, the lava has done good service by running out some little distance into the sea, and forming a natural breakwater. Here are several trading stations and the homes of numerous fishermen. Indeed, the spot would seem to have been far better suited for the situation of the capital than that determined by the gods (*alias* chance) of the pioneers. But the lava streams in the vicinity have been described by almost every visitor in terms which fully entitle them to the character this chapter confers upon them. Says Mr. Forbes: 'A short ten minutes' rest, and we are ascending the slag ridge, which lies on the western shores of the fjord, and from its crest a picture of erratic ruin bursts upon the eye, unsurpassed even in this desolate isle. The entire district looks as if it had been baked, broiled, burnt, and boiled by some devilish hand, until its chemical soul had fled, and left nought behind save a grim, grey shroud of darkness and despair.' 'Sometimes we are crossing frothy, and at other times cavernous lava'; 'as for the road, it was simply like battering along on the domes of a succession of cast-iron ovens; in some places more rideable than in others from the wrinkled and ropy surface they presented, but always both slippery and tortuous.' Mackenzie looked further into these 'ovens,' and discovered that in many cases the roofs of the bubbles or blisters had burst, 'and disclosed caverns lined with melted matter, in the form of stalactites.'

One of these cave-like orifices he discovered to be seven or eight feet in height and fifty-five yards in length. It appears that much of this molten matter was ejected from rifts in the plain, or on the hillsides, rather



Krísuvík.

than from any central crater, and that in its uncanny career it even ran uphill sometimes, when the crust hardened over it and formed a kind of pipe, through which the pressure from behind continued to force the spluttering torrent.

The ponies dance over it in a manner that none but Icelandic animals dare attempt. Mr. Coles tells a story of one which succeeded in getting down the ladder into the second cabin of the steamer in which he returned, and which had to be dragged up on deck again with a tackle. The tale is perfectly credible; indeed, the only wonder is that there was any necessity whatever for the tackle.

A few miles further south a curious illustration of river methods may be seen in the case of the Kaldá, which commences in a hollow, where numerous springs unite to form a respectable stream at once. For a couple of miles it runs down the valley, and then plunges into a lava cave, and is lost.

On the summit of the ridge are several ancient craters and cinder heaps, while the hollows are often filled with the black sand characteristic of such localities. Here and there, too, are indications of the sulphur earth, of which we shall soon have enough and to spare. On looking down from the ridge, there appears on the left the somewhat extensive lake of Kleisarvatn, and in front are the miles of steaming, fuming, smoking brimstone beds, the objects of our search.

Already we have seen that the wonderful systems of thermal springs in this northern isle depend, as to secondary causes, upon the decomposition of the palagonite rock, and that the beauties of the delicate geyserite fringes in Haukadal depend upon the presence of alkaline and faintly acid vapours. Here, on the contrary, the uprushing jets are strongly charged with sulphurous acid, which decomposes the soil through which it rises. At the same time, it is itself split up by the oxide of iron, with which it comes in contact, and sulphuric acid is formed, which immediately attacks the remaining constituents of the rock, converting them into beds of bubbling clay, paint-pots of red and white and blue.

In other cases, the sulphurous acid is met by sulphuretted hydrogen, and compelled to deposit its sulphur in and upon the reeking masses, or to belch it forth in grimy clouds. Well may Bunsen, to whom we owe so much for his investigations, remark: 'Where the spring system inclines more towards the valleys,' 'the traveller continually meets with pools of boiling mud, in which a horrible, bluish-black argillaceous paste rises in huge bubbles, which, on bursting, often throw the boiling mud to a height of upwards of fifteen feet, accumulating its masses in crater-like ledges round the basin of the opening. These phenomena constitute a picture of the wildest desolation, only to be surpassed in horror by the dread waste of the dark rocky masses by which the scene is enclosed.'

From the fumeroles and suffiones, as the orifices of the jets forming the solfataras are called, steam or gas is often driven with a hissing noise, which may be heard some miles away, and around them crusts of sublimated sulphur may frequently be found several inches in thickness. Approach, however, is always more or less dangerous, as the crust may give way, and cause one's feet and legs to plunge into a bath of scalding mud, an event which has been by no means unknown in the past. However, a board or two may be found, and laid across, so as to secure firm footing. For years the Icelanders had secured the purer portions of the crust, and the beautiful crystals of sulphur underneath, which they bartered in exchange for needed goods, but



AMONG THE SULPHUR SPRINGS AT KRÍSUVÍK.

only of late years have attempts been made to work the deposits as a regular commercial undertaking. Unfortunately these attempts have failed, and nothing is being done at present. The difficulties are, the slow rate of deposition; the wet, muddy nature of the material, which prevents part of it from being burnt in kilns, to melt the rest, as is done in Sicily; and the long distance and bad roads which separate the beds from Hafnarfjörthr, where the product may be shipped.

West of Krísuvík, a ragged track leads through a desert of slags, and sand, and lava, to Grindavík, where a number of cottages inhabited by fishermen centre round the little church of Stathr. Some years ago a furious storm burst on the wintry sea, on a dark December day, and hurled

some fishing-boats on this savage strand. Not a man escaped alive; and so great was the impression then produced on Síra Oddur Gislason, the pastor of the village, that ever since he has spent the summer months in wandering round the coast of Iceland on a special mission to the seamen. The English Mission to Deep Sea Fishermen has given him some help, and the Religious Tract Society has provided him with a supply of Icelandic tracts. He tries to get the men to take greater care at sea, by teaching them to use sheets of sailcloth, towed behind their boats, to keep them from drifting out; and to carry oil, wherewith to restrain the violence of the waves. In his own church he has introduced a Bible-reading after the stated service, and long as that generally is, the people attend the reading gladly.

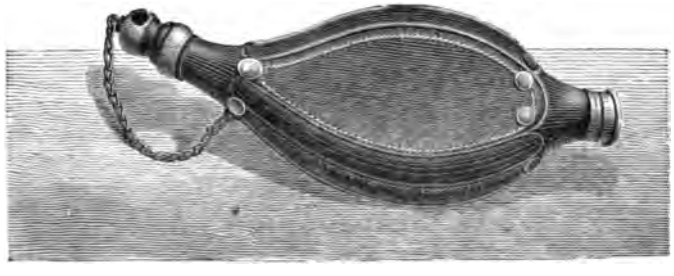
During the latter half of winter—February, March, and April—large numbers of the country people come down to these western coasts, and join the fishermen in their labours, especially perhaps at Njarthvík, on the northern shore of the Sýsla. The days are short and dreary, just as in summer they are long and light, yet frequently, in their darkest hours, they are lit up by the quivering radiance of a bright aurora, which gleams across the heaving wastes of troubled waters, like the throbbing beat of angels' wings. But in gleam or gloom the fishermen must labour, and the harvest of the sea be reaped, in part at least, from the rich productive banks of Faxa Fjörthr.

Throughout the promontory, *gjás*, or rifts, mostly the work of earthquakes, may be found, chasms of whose unfathomed depths little or nothing has been ascertained. One of these leads almost to the extremity of the Point of Reykjanes, so well-known to English travellers as the turning-point on the homeward voyage, and the site of the only lighthouse whose beams shine out across Icelandic seas. Even the rock on which it stands has not escaped the shocks of recent date.

Beyond the point lie several rocky islets, the nearest known as Eldey and Eldeyjardrangr, Fire Island, and Fire Island's column. These *drangs*, or solitary peaks, occur in many places round the coast, standing erect and lonely, like the Old Man of Hoy. The names of these islands sufficiently set forth their nature. Originally united to the mainland, the ridge was broken through by earthquake and by denudation, notably in 1390, till nothing but these peaks remained. Once, indeed, in 1783, a month before the fearful eruption in the Skaptá Valley, the latent force blazed out once more, and flung up a mass of slaggy lava which formed a new island, surrounded by such fields of pumice that ships in passing were impeded by the floating masses. Remaining just long enough to be claimed for the King of Denmark, under the name of Nyöe, it disappeared again within the year.

The islands further out are Geirfuglasker, or the Gare-fowl-skerries, with another Drangr. The name in this case is not unlike an epitaph, for it commemorates the old inhabitants of the island, a curious kind of penguin,

the great auk, the largest of its genus. Once, this curious bird abounded everywhere around the northernmost Atlantic shores, from Newfoundland to Russian Lapland. It was found in large numbers at Funk Island, in the west, where millions fell beneath the blows of sticks, which reckless, ruthless hunters wielded only too successfully. An almost wingless bird, for the flaps which took the place of wings were useful only in the water, it could seek no safety, and so was everywhere exterminated, especially as it laid but a single egg, and therefore multiplied but slowly at the best. It lingered on these lonely peaks, but even they subsided somewhat in 1830, and reduced its foothold. In 1844 or 1848, it disappeared entirely; in 1888 a single egg was sold in London for £225, and a reward of £500 for a living specimen has failed to find a claimant.



AN ICELANDIC SNUFF-BOX.



AN ICELANDIC FUNERAL.



AN ANCIENT SILVER BROOCH.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE WESTERN CLASSIC LAND.

FROM Reykjavík to the North many routes present themselves. We may swiftly pass from point to point on the deck of the mail boat, or secure a passage in a smaller native steamer. On the other hand, there is the post road through Mosfell, or the Stórisandr way to the central north. The best way of all is to take a boat across the bay to the Hvalfjörthr, buy one's ponies there, and then work north among the many points of interest which everywhere abound. Famous for its birds, and beasts, and fishes, and its thickly-peopled bogs and mountain slopes, which offer such a striking contrast to the rugged lavas we have quitted, the district every year receives its quota of sportsmen, fishermen, and travellers, who wander in the footsteps of those early colonists whose memory yet remains in mound and tomb, in place name, song, and saga.

We enter the fjord between the stately piles of Esja and Akrafjall, which rise some two or three thousand feet on either hand. Beneath the former are the limestone rocks of Kollafjörthr, and two shrines of widely different moment. The first, at Kjalarnes, is that of the ancient *hof*, or heathen temple, where the chiefest of the local *things* was wont to meet before the establishment of the Althíng at Thíngvellir. Nothing, however, now remains except the site. These hofs were numerous in Iceland. They differed from the *hörgs*, which were enclosures open to the sky, in being covered buildings, at one end of which was the place of sacrifice, an arrangement betraying the pagan origin of the 'chancel,' which in the hands of Romanists and their imitators reverts to its heathen use.

Nor of the other shrine, at Esjuberg, can more be seen, yet it marks the most sacred spot in Iceland, for here its earliest Christian church was built by Örlygr Hreppson, a disciple of the Hebridean Bishop Patrick. It

was dedicated to Columba, the apostle of the Northern British Church. The history of these early churches deserves far more attention than it yet has gained. Of course the monkish chroniclers ignored them, just as they did in England, as much as possible; but how far the light they held was instrumental in preventing the darkest parts of Thangbrand's superstition from ever gaining ground in Iceland has yet to be revealed.

The basalt rocks which bound the fjords remind us of the buttresses in the eastern gulfs, and, like them, present alternate layers of massive rock and crumbling red and yellow tufa, while the whole is rent from base to summit by splits now occupied by 'dykes' of later basalt. The pathways, too, are strewn with agates, chalcedonies of various hues, and zeolites.

Two valleys open out at the fjord head, and between them lies the Mull, while beyond appear the horn-like peaks of Súlur. In Botnsdalr, the northernmost of these valleys, is the waterfall of Glymr, of which Mr. Lock remarks: 'In order to reach the sea it leaps into a chasm some 1200 to 1500 feet in depth, and so narrow that daylight scarce reaches to the bottom; yet so sheer is the fall, so clean the split of the earth, that by long and attentive peering, a tiny thread of silver may be seen winding along at the bottom of the cañon.' The vale is overlooked by the storm-swept *thýrill*, cream or egg whisk, so called from the furious blasts which, as Burton says, 'hurl men from their horses,' 'and raise sheets of sea-water high in the air, tearing them to pieces like snow.'

Westwards the path leads round the boggy coastland plains of Leira. An alternative track, with finer views, crosses the rugged wild of Skarthsheithi, at an elevation of nearly 3000 feet, where 'grim walls' of frowning rock and 'moss-clad boulders,' rich with tints of vivid green and homely red and brown, interspersed with innumerable specimens of the now familiar basalt minerals, reward the climber. The northern slope leads down to Borgarfjörthr, where the best ponies in the land are bred and pastured, in the mountain valleys, in almost half-wild droves. Many come down from the northern fjords to spend the winter in these more sheltered valleys. A favoured district this; as we descend, we find the wayside redolent with meadow-sweet, while lower down the rocks are clothed with thrift, and the bogs beneath are bright with parnassia and marsh marigolds. On our right is the curious pyramid of Honn, a most remarkable four-sided mountain, built up of beds of basalt, ending in a point, and far across the valley shines the no less curious white, columnar, trachyte cone of Baula, or the Cow, over 3000 feet in height. In the centre is the deep and rushing Hvítá, or White River, muddy with the débris of the stately Eyríksjökull. Its waters and those of its innumerable tributaries abound in salmon. Hither comes the fisherman, so neatly drawn by Monsieur Pouchet, for whom just now there live but rods and lines, picturing to himself the

unheard-of numbers of the catch, wherewith his club shall be astonished, and the readers of the newspapers regaled. The fish may be bought on every river at about fourpence per pound. Birds, too, are plentiful, swans on the lowland meres, and ducks above, with the usual mountain birds beyond.

Across the valley lived the famous Egil Skallagrímsson, the hero of the saga called by his name. He appears to have been, as Mr. Metcalfe says, a skald of the first flight, a warrior without fear and without reproach, a tower of strength, and a notable magician. He was the friend and ally of the English Athelstan in his war with Olaf, from whence he came with rich store of garments and of silver. 'To King Erik Bloodaxe, who tried to cheat him of his inheritance in Norway, he bid defiance, and actually slew his son, Prince Ragnvald.' How the tide of fortune turned, Erik, expelled from Norway, becoming Earl of Northumberland, and Egil, landing shipwrecked on the coast, becoming captive to his foe, and escaping only by the aid of one of the king's Norwegian henchmen—and a song of praise for Erik—may be read in Metcalfe. Soon, perhaps, English readers will have the whole, and read the touching story of his lament for Bodvar, a parallel to David's grief for Absalom. Here, too, is the scene in part of the Heidarvíga Saga, the oldest of the Iceland stories, though the 'heath' which saw the 'slaying' lies further north; and in this valley, up the Thverá, lived Hænsa-thorir, the wretched pedlar who refused to sell his surplus hay one winter, when his neighbour's animals were starving. To hear of some being taken without his leave, though with payment of full price, is interesting. The tale of his malicious seeking for revenge is less so. Then comes the rush of incident, as common in the sagas as rapids in the island rivers, turbid with jökull débris, as the story is with deeds of cunning hate. Thorir, with a band of allies, rides to the homestead of the man of action and of kindliness, whose silver bought the hay, and charges him with theft. Little wonder that the answer was an arrow from one of the bonder's friends, but oh, the pity of it, that the billet should have been the body of the pedlar's foster-son, from whose pure lips the wretch pretends to hear a call to burn the household, which is done that night. The lawsuits we may leave, content to know that Thorir met his doom at last.

Diverging to the right is the famous Reykholtsdalr, the Vale of the Smoking Hill. From the entrance a score or more of great steam columns are visible, rising, if the air be still, like cloudy pillars. Here is a solitary vent, from which a bubbling stream proceeds, a prelude to the hissing spluttering group of sixteen sister springs which form the Túnguhver, or tongue-caldron, so called because they occupy the side and base of a mound some twenty feet in height and five-and-thirty yards in length. Clays, red, white, and blue, surround them, but the deposits have neither the brilliancy of the sulphur beds nor the silicious beauty of the sinter fretwork. Never-

theless, the scene must ever be remarkable from the wonderful activity of the fizzing, hissing, puffing jets, and the rushing vapour clouds that hover round them. So winding is the river-bed that it has to be crossed repeatedly as we ascend the valley to a spot where, right in the centre of the river, on an oblong mound some ten feet high, three other jets occur. The principal orifice, says Mr. Forbes, is 'a couple of feet in diameter, of considerable depth, funnel-shaped, and by far the most violent.'

Two miles further up the valley lies the parsonage of Reykholt, one of the richest livings in the island. But its interest circles round the figure of Iceland's greatest statesman, lauded by some historians as a wise, far-sighted man, who sought to give his countrymen a heritage of peace through compact with the kings of Norway, but looked upon by his compeers as the meanest, most ambitious of his race. The event proved, as it ever must, that all concessions to a dictatorial priesthood, whether instruments or principals, are but the seeds of a fruitful crop of fresh demands. Snorri Sturluson was born at Hvammr in 1178; at twenty-one he married the heiress of Bersa the Rich, by which, and by inheritance, he soon became the wealthiest and most powerful chief in Iceland. Elected 'Speaker' in 1215, he travelled to the Althíng with 600 men as escort, and drew upon himself the envy of his countrymen, just as by his poems and his writings he had secured the notice of Hakon, King of Norway. To him he went in 1218, and during a three years' stay accumulated the materials for his Saga of the Kings of Norway, known in later years as the *Heimskringla*. On his return he was again elected *Lögsögumathr;* he held the post for ten years, planning, plotting, scheming with the bishops and the king for the Norwegian overlordship; but his avarice, and the constant feuds stirred up thereby, aroused the land against him, and he fled to Norway. Hearing, however, in 1240, that his son-in-law, Gissur Thorvaldsson, had routed some of his enemies, he returned once more, to die but a year or two later, on this very spot, by Gissur's hand. Had he, the most accomplished scholar of his age, but left intriguing priests alone, the graphic pictures of his chronicles, with the strength and beauty of their imagery, would have been a crown of unalloyed renown. A memorial of him yet remains in Snorri's Bath, a basin some fifteen feet in diameter and four feet deep, supplied by a little aqueduct with boiling water from a spring called Skribla, a hundred yards away, now used for little else than washing wool. The ruins of a wall wherewith his 'castle' was surrounded may yet be traced, and a questionable tomb is shown within the little churchyard.

Five or six hours north-east lies Kalmanstunga, an oasis in a lava plain, where rich grass land, and even tracts of Icelandic 'forest,' far finer than those above Thíngvellir, are shut in by a double barrier of contorted lava and of glorious snow-capped mountains. Even Lock speaks of the 'picturesque grandeur' of the scene. Right opposite is Eyríksjökull, a lofty dome

of snow, resting on a rock foundation whose buttresses descend in walls which are almost perpendicular. The place derives importance from its position at the junction of these valley tracks with the Stórisandr cross-country route, and general report speaks anything but favourably of the ideas of the owners as to reckonings. A few miles further on is the famous Surtshellir, a vast, far-reaching labyrinthine cave within the very entrails of the lava, an exaggerated specimen of Forbes' 'ovens.' It is, in fact, a series of enormous bubbles distended in the liquid lava, which, solidifying, formed these dome-like roofs, as much as twelve feet thick and some-



THE ENTRANCE TO SURTSHELLIR.

times a hundred feet across. Mr. Forbes says: 'Hobbling our horses, we descend into a chasm caused by a rent in the surface of several domes, thus forming the vestibule of these satanic halls; it is about 40 feet in depth, 50 in width, and 700 in length, and very irregular. At either extremity of this vestibule entrances present themselves into adjoining domes and corridors. We scramble over alternate blocks of ice and rock, and lighting our candles—for we are in utter darkness—first explore a branch on the right, in which were strewed a few bones: of course our guide, as in duty bound, made the most of them; robbers had made this their hiding-place in ages past, this was the débris of their orgies, etc. We bowed acquiescence, though they were in all probability the remains of some unfortunate wild ponies. As the roof became inconveniently low, and the floor watery, we

retraced our steps, and tried the so-called robbers' cavern on the opposite side. This was much more extensive and roomy, and hung with stalactites.' Mr. E. T. Holland appears to have entered another, for he says: 'In five minutes we reached the most beautiful fairy grotto imaginable. From the crystal floor of ice rose group after group of transparent icy pillars, while from the glittering roof most brilliant icy pendants hung down to meet them. Columns and arches of ice were ranged along the crystalline walls; the light of our candles was reflected back a hundredfold from every side, till the whole cavern shone with wondrous lustre. I never saw a more brilliant scene; indeed, it would be difficult to imagine anything more fairy-like.'

Apparently the caves have never been completely traversed, and though they certainly do not extend to Langanes, as tradition has affirmed, their area must be considerable. In some places the roofs have burst, and the light streams in through the open rifts. Of these and other details Ida Pfeiffer has given a not uninteresting account.

Just beyond Surtshellir begins the 'interminable maze' of land-locked mountain tarns, the home of swans and other wild-fowl, which dot the wilds of Arnarvatnsheithi, forming one of the three uncounted things of Iceland; the others being the islets of Breidifjörthr and the volcanic cones of Vatnsdal. Returning down the Hvítá valley and cutting right across the Myra Sýsla—Mire or Bog Country—we shall strike the sea-shore again at the north-eastern corner of Faxa Fjörthr, close to one of the most remarkable even of Icelandic craters. Rising abruptly from a lava bed, it looks for all the world like an ancient castle keep, with the slopes of débris round its base for sides of the castle hill. The lava rim or rampart round its head resembles nothing more than a line of broken towers and battlements, and gives the well-earned name of Eldborg, or Fireburg. Behind the narrow rampart Henderson, the indefatigable, discovered the empty crater yawning.

A couple of miles north of Rauthimelr, and at several other places in the peninsula, another variety of volcanic spring occurs, the Ölkelda or Ale-well. Immense quantities of carbonic acid bubble through the water, which forms a reservoir of soda-water, impregnated too with iron; though of chalybeate springs of the ordinary type perhaps those of Buthir, a little further west, are better specimens. Here, Burton says, huts of a roughish kind have been run up for invalids. There are fine basaltic columns too at Rauthimelr, but these must yield to the ranges lying round the Bay of Stapi, just underneath the lovely crystal pyramid of Snæfellsjökull, known to the boys as the starting-point of Verne's fantastic 'journey.'

Mackenzie says of Stapi: 'The coast is very remarkable; presenting for the extent of about two miles striking and beautiful columnar appearances, both in the cliffs which form the shore and in the numerous insulated rocks which appear at different distances from the land. The ranges of columns, which in general are about fifty feet high, and perfectly regular in their

forms, are variously broken, in consequence of their exposure to the action of the sea. In some places large caves have been formed, and in two of these the light is admitted by fissures in the roof, producing a very singular and striking effect. In general, the ranges of columns have a vertical position; but in different places they are disposed in bundles upon one another in all



ELDBORG, OR FIREBURG.

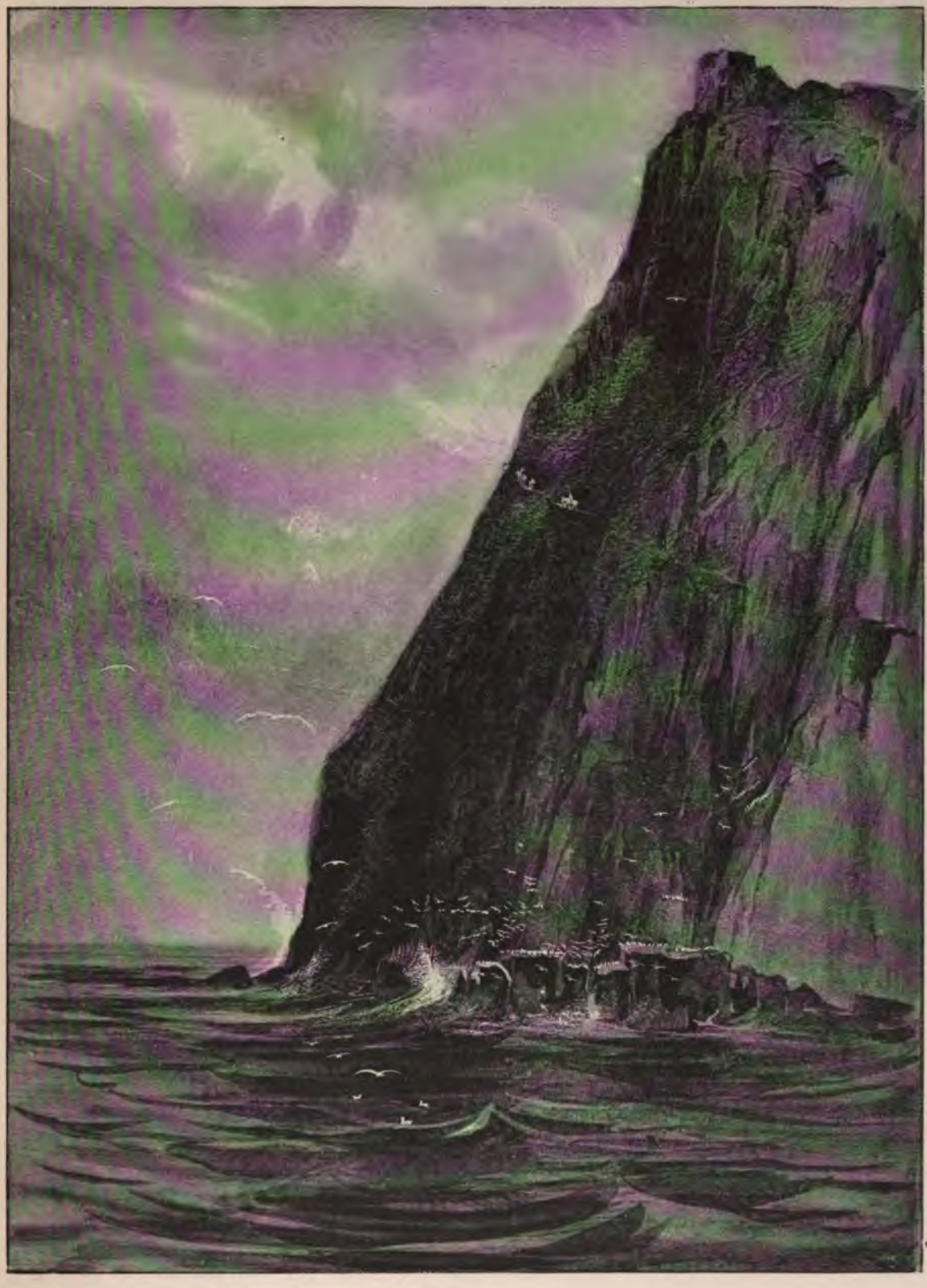
directions. In several instances they appear diverging from a centre; and they assume, in short, every form which such rocks can be imagined to take.' Indeed, Stapi is a miniature Giant's Causeway, or perhaps rather a series of diminutive Staffas.

The 'insulated rocks' aforesaid do not cease with Stapi; several fine

ones may be seen to the west, rising two hundred feet above the waves. Drangr is the native name, and they are easily accounted for, being trolls, or giants, converted into pillars, not of salt, but stone! Anywhere else they would be imposing monuments, but examined from the sea they are dwarfed by the glorious pile behind them. The mighty forces slumbering in the bowels of the earth first flung the slags, the cinders, and the lavas which compose the cone and triple peak of Snæfellsjökull to a height of 4710 feet above the level of the ocean, whose waves still thunder round its base on every side but one. And then the frost king came, and threw a robe of pure white sparkling snow around the shoulders of the mountain pyramid, from which the shores of two great firths recede for fifty miles on either side, as if to leave the bright vision free to show its beauty unconfined. The ascent has been attempted many a time, since Ólafson essayed to climb in 1755, followed by Stanley, Bright and Holland, Henderson, the Frenchman Gaimard, and Commander Forbes; but never yet successfully. Fog and storm repelled a few, and others gained the snow slopes' summit, only to find themselves cut off from the loftiest peak by deep crevasses, ice walls, or rock faces. As the Thyra glided under its ruddy scars and frowning pedestals, rumour spoke of many other expeditions, one indeed of recent date, for which success was claimed, but confirmation still is lacking. And then the conversation drifted to the Öræfa. 'That was a tall walk,' said Dr. Hjaltalin; while some one chimed in with the patriotic query, 'Did you take any Icelanders with you?' or was there underneath the question just a spice of incredulity?

Picturesque tracks from Buthir, or from Stapi, at the usual elevation of about 2000 feet, the latter passing near a fine cascade, converge on Ólafsvík, a little seaport on the north, while another coasts round the promontory, ending in a kind of undercliff, beneath the lofty bluffs of Enni, so often swept by descending fragments of the ruddy scoria as to be somewhat dangerous. An even more startling path presents itself across the face of Búlandshöfthi to the east, where a headland terminates in cliffs 2000 feet in height. The highest portion of the face is extremely steep, the lowest perpendicular, and between the two are crumbling screes, broken at intervals by the edges of the terraces on which they rest. 'Midway across the treacherous surface,' says Mr. Forbes, 'we were condemned to pass. The track is visible here and there; but frost and rain are ever at work, disintegrating the mountain side, and at every step our ponies sent young avalanches of stones and rubbish into the abyss beneath.' 'For fervid magnificence this scene could not be surpassed. Beneath, almost under our feet, though a thousand feet below, the insatiable seas were gnawing and undermining the very precipice to which the gale and sleet were posting us.'

I heard a story of a stormy passage of one of these headlands, when the traveller's pony slipped and fell, or more probably the stones gave way beneath him. His rider dropped from the saddle to the path, and reached



BÚLANDSHÖFTHI.

the foot in safety. Three days later, when the storm had ended, some men went up with ropes, and found the pony standing on three legs on a ledge too small for further foothold, from which they pulled him up again.

On rounding the point, two curious basalt hills appear in front, Sukkertoppr, or the Sugar-loaf, and Líkkista, the Coffin, whose names sufficiently explain their shape. 'All the way from Olafsvík to Grundarfjörthr, a distance of twenty miles,' says Mackenzie, 'the mountain scenery is very fine. The lofty precipices are varied in every form, and the summits of the mountains are broken into a thousand abrupt and singular shapes. Cataracts are seen foaming and dashing from the rocks, and nothing but wood is wanting to make this one of the most picturesque countries in the world.'

Nor is the interest only natural; for we are entering the territory of the 'Ere Dwellers,' and almost every creek and headland has its story in the Eyrbyggja Saga. Here, for instance, under Drápuhlitharfjall, is the Bearsark's lava, where dwelt Styr, to whom two of these adventurers had joined themselves. After a while, Halli, one of them, falls in love with Ásdis, the stately daughter of his lord, who interposes, only, however, to receive a lengthy answer, almost equivalent to, Your daughter or your life. Styr temporises, begs three days for consideration with his friends, and talks the matter over with Snorri the priest. On his return he informs Halli, that as he is impecunious, he must do something great instead. This suits the Bearsark, who probably expects an order for a foray, but instead receives the commonplace command to break a pathway through the lava, and build a burg and boundary wall. Then, says Styr, 'I will give thee Ásdis.' Halli answers, Jacob fashion, 'I am not wont to work, yet will I say yea to this, if thereby I may the easier have the maiden for my wife.' And the Bearsark brethren labour, and so does Styr, for he builds a bath, with a trap-door over the fore-chamber, and a hole through which the furnace may be fed; while the road progresses, Ásdis passes, and Halli stops to sing—

'O fairfoot, O linen girt goddess that beareth
The flame that is hanging from fair limbs adown,
Whither now hast thou dight thee thy ways to be wending,
O fair wight, O tell me, and lie not in telling?
For all through the winter, O wise-hearted warden
Of the board of the chess-play, not once I beheld thee
From out of the houses fare this-wise afoot,
So goodly of garments, so grand of array.'

And Leikner added—

'The ground of the gold sun, that gleams in the isle-belt,
But seldom hath dight her the headgear so stately,
The fir of the fire of the perch of the falcon
Is laden with load of fine work of the loom.

O ground strewn with jewels, O fair-spoken goddess
Of beakers the bright, now I bid thee be telling
What is it that under thy pride lieth lurking?
What hast thou thereunder of more than we wot?' [1]

The work done, Styr invites them to the new bath-house. No sooner are they safely caged, than stones are piled against the outer door, and the furnace heated seven times the hotter. They presently discover something wrong, and make a dash for freedom. Halli thrusts the trap-door up, but Styr has placed a raw oxhide before it, on which the Bearsark stumbles, and is soon disposed of, while his comrade is thrust back into the bath-house. Styr then sings of his prowess! and Snorri marries Ásdis!

To the right is Drápuhlith, with its curious beds of mineralised wood, of trap and corrugated lava, of sand and tufa, glowing with the lurid tints of red and yellow, indigo and black, that make one wonder why painters do not oftener seek Icelandic inspiration. To the left is Helgafell, the holy mount of heathendom, beneath which stood, on Thórsnes, the Thunderer's famous hof. Here, too, met another great provincial 'thing.' The stone circle of the Dómhringr, or Doom ring, yet remains in part, and tradition shows the Blótsteinn, or sacrificial stone, on which victims to the god, or criminals condemned by legal process, had their backs broken. But Helgafell has a later history. Here Snorri lived, he of the famous question in the Althíng, and hither was removed, in 1183, the monastery at first established on the Isle of Flatey.

The whole district teems with interest, and fortunately excellent quarters may be had at the trading post of Stykkishólmr hard by, though that is true of almost every point referred to on the peninsula of Snæfellsnes. 'Sticksholm' gains its name from the bundles of basaltic pillars upon an islet, which, with two or three more, forms an excellent harbour. Here the mail steamer makes its first call on the northward journey, and time enough is left for a ramble over the wrack-fringed beach, and among the really good substantial stores, mostly two-storied buildings, on to the fishers' cots and farms beyond. Just here Breithifjörthr divides. The entrance to the southern arm, named Hrammfjörthr, is occupied by countless islets, the homes of eider ducks and the landing-places of adventurous seals. Hence sailed Eirík Rauthi in 981, to found a colony in Western Greenland.

At Hvamm, in its northern corner, one of the loveliest spots in Iceland, lived Auth the Rich, buried below high-water mark, lest her bones should lie in the heathen land. The heathen had a corresponding story of a stiff-necked one, a woman too, who bade her corpse be buried in a wild mountain valley, 'twixt Skarth and Buthardalr, lest the church bells at either should disturb her rest. Days of conflict those. Better that than

[1] These verses are taken from the new translation of the Saga, by Morris and Magnússon, in which the epithets of the original are so happily reproduced.

compromise, the crafty scheme of priesthood, or the despicable refuge of trade-ridden Christianity. At Hjartharholt, centre of the territory of the Laxdæla Saga, dwelt Olaf the Peacock, in such state that, when his father died, he summoned all who would, to celebrate his obsequies, and entertained nine hundred revellers for a fortnight. But those were days when men returned from forays with shiploads of captives, costly stuffs, and treasure.

Our next call is at Flatey, an island in the centre of the northern gulf. Though scarcely a mile across, it has several farms, and a church above the average, which boasts a kind of tower and decorated front, while roughly ornamented palings enclose the little churchyard. Of course it serves the neighbouring islands in addition, and an interesting sight must be the converging boats, when weather lets the folk assemble to the service.

Here is a shark-oil refinery. The fishery is carried on by men, who use heavy lines ending in a yard or two of chain, and a hook six inches to a foot in length, baited with seal-blubber or horseflesh. The Hákarl, as they call the creature, averages twenty feet in length. When caught the carcase is hauled alongside, and ripped open to extract the liver, which, when landed, is boiled down in the vats before us, the stench from which is a never-failing guide to their whereabouts. The oil is exported mainly to Denmark and to Germany for use in the tanneries, though a considerable amount goes somewhere under the name of cod-liver oil—from which indeed some writers consider it almost indistinguishable. On the northern coasts larger boats are used, of about forty tons burden, manned by eight or ten men.

The name of Flatey has also given its title to the *Codex Flateyensis*, or Flatey Book, though most of the work of transcription of that famous manuscript was done upon the promontory we have lately quitted. It is regarded as, perhaps, the most perfect of the ancient annals, and is unique in its possession of a title-page. The subject matter is mainly chronicles of Norwegian kings. Solid though the work of manufacture must have been when every word was written, a touch of humour in the owner flickers out sometimes, as in the Icelander who, nearly six hundred years ago, scribbled—

'This is Hauk's Book
If he be not robbed.'



PONIES LADEN WITH DRY FISH.

CHAPTER IX.

THE NORTH-WEST PENINSULA.

THE North-west Peninsula has been happily compared in shape to the fingers of an outstretched hand, of which the Snæfells horn will represent the thumb. It is, indeed, 'almost an island,' for although eighty miles across in its widest part, the wrist uniting it to the rest of Iceland is only seven miles in width. This isthmus is a boggy valley, down which flows, in an easterly direction, a stream that rises in some inconsiderable hills, within a mile of the western shore. 'A troll,' says Mr. Metcalfe, 'once formed the laudable design of driving a canal through, in a single night. He set lustily to work; and the innumerable islets in Breithifjörthr are due to the muck shovelled out by this intrepid navvy. The enterprise, however, failed—*opera interrupta manebant*—the sun rising upon him unawares, and sending him the way of all troll flesh not under cover at daybreak, viz., into stone.'

Hardly less fanciful is the suggestion that 'ancient glaciers meeting the Greenland icebergs,' have jagged the great divisions of the peninsula into a saw-blade of minor indentations. The statement of the result is excellent, but for origin it is quite unnecessary to go beyond the great upheaval which thrust the splintering mass from the ocean depths. Slight modifications in

form, of course, are in constant progress. The two great flattened domes of snow and ice which occupy the centres of the main divisions, and which are known as the Dranga, or Solitary Peak, and the Glámu, or Clashing Jökulls, feed a few glaciers usually ending in steep ice falls, re-echoing from time to time with the crash of falling pinnacles, from which indeed, together with the roar of waterfalls, the latter of the two derives its name. The space, however, that these decreasing snowfields occupy is but comparatively small, and the flatness of their surface renders their motion very slow. To some extent they contribute to the removal of the débris from the valleys which they enter, but neither they nor the rivers are sufficient to account for these curious gulfs. Moreover, the depth of water in the fjord is unaccounted for by any of these processes, and the geological answer that the whole must have sunk since excavated, is not in harmony with other features. Well may Professor Pouchet remark: 'It is so easy to comprehend Nature in books, so difficult when watching her with a little care.' The two most powerful agencies at work appear to be, in winter time, the frost, which detaches blocks from the higher portions of the cliffs, and the sun, which thaws the binding ice, and sends them thundering down into the deep ravines. And under the midsummer sunrays, too, the blocks on the southern sides expand, and crack, and fall.

It used to be thought that the population was a wild, half-savage race, but nothing more untrue could be asserted, as we shall presently see for ourselves. Indeed, in the study of Saga literature, many of them have held a place distinguished even among Icelandic students. The tracks which traverse the wild interior, and lead from coast to coast, are almost always difficult, and the snow, as a rule, blockades the upper levels until the month of June.

At the western end of the isthmus lies the picturesque Gilsfjörthr, famous for its petrified trees, and right in the corner is another Gullfoss, with the usual treasure hidden beneath its dashing surges. If the sea-fisheries are not over-productive here, there is compensation in the trout and char with which the streams abound. Along the southern coast the headlands show a grand succession of bold, precipitous bluffs rising to heights of from one to two thousand feet above the sea, in the depths of which their foundations lie. Dykes of basalt break the masses at intervals, and at times are continued across the sands, where such occur at the feet of cliffs containing enormous beds of ruddy tufa.

Further west is the 'famous bird-cliff of Latraberg,' the home of myriads of auks and guillemots, reached like those of the Faröes by ropes from above. Farms dot the sides of every fjord, and are plentifully supplied with drift-wood. Few of these recesses have been explored by Englishmen, and many a cataract valley waits investigation. Henderson speaks of Forsheithi: 'A very high and acclivitous mountain road, so called from the

cataracts and cascades that abound on both sides of the mountain. Those on the north are peculiarly beautiful; the River Fossa having forced its way through beds of columnar rock, numerous turrets and spires present themselves amidst the clouds of mist arising from the waterfalls.'

Swinging round Staalbierg Point, the most westerly corner of Iceland, in the night, we enter Denmark Strait, and find ourselves, on Sunday morning, at anchor in Patreksfjörthr, a not unsuitable resting-place, for the name recalls at once the ancient church. It appears however that it comes, not from the Irish apostle, but from a namesake of his. Away to the east is another relic, in the name of Brjanslækr. We are opposite a trading station known as Vatneyri. These *Eyris* are a most providential feature in the northern fjords. Usually banks of shingle, they run like breakwaters into the sea at right angles to the shore, and afford a haven of refuge wherever they occur. The theory is that the sea, beating its shingle landward, meets with a counter current, and so deposits its burden.

A few American fishing-boats are left; many have departed already, for the season is fast concluding. Gloucester, in Massachusetts, almost rivals Dunkirk or the ports of the Côtes-du-Nord in the equipment of its fleet. The French author already quoted gives a life-like sketch of the difference between the sailors who man these ships. The Frenchman, working for the owner, landing at times, listless, idle, with a pocket as lean as his poor cadaverous face, hopeless, miserable to a degree. The Yankee, paddling his own canoe, pocketing all the gain, dashing ashore in his citizen dress, and flinging his dollars everywhere, drinking, roystering, catching the ponies, and scampering off, frightening the Icelander out of his wits.

Our next stay, for an hour or so, at Bíldudalr, gave us some glorious views of the splendid basalt buttresses of Arnarfjörthr; on leaving which the question rose of service. In the afternoon one of our pastor passengers held an impromptu gathering on deck. Surely nowhere does a psalm or hymn sound sweeter than at sea. Then in a quiet simple talk he pressed on his hearers the need of Christ for the Icelander. We had a number on board, using the steamer to save a lengthy overland journey. A boat like this, leaving Reykjavík just as the Althing closes, gives to an Englishman excellent opportunities of seeing a favourable side of Icelandic life, for the sitting of the parliament affords a happy meeting-time for scattered friends, and a curious chain of intermarriage links most of the island with the capital. The evening closes with another toss on the open sea as we round the headland into Dyrafjörthr, and anchor off the thriving station called Thíngeyri. Some derive the name from Dyra, an old Norse settler, others from Dyr, a wild beast, a fox perhaps, a word recurring in our English Derby. The lights of a few fishing-boats shine through the twilight, and a fine peak rises to the south. In the morning the great sweeping edges of the mountain valleys, like the ruins of exaggerated craters, provide a

variation in the scenery. This is a flourishing post; an energetic trader is ready to supply requirements from pins and needles up to anchors, spars, and sailcloth. Higher up the fjord is a whale-fishing station, one of the three established on this coast. Stores of cod-fish and the usual shark oil refinery add to the prosperity of the place, and increase its odoriferousness. Far up, in the sheltered valleys at the fjord head, are some bosky dingles, and beyond, the Glámu Jökull.

Our next stay, at Önundarfjörthr, brought us face to face with modern whale-fishing in full operation—a very different thing from the dangerous chase so long familiar in our story-books. That quest, the hunting of the *Balæna mysticetus*, the 'right' whale, began in Biscayan waters, in the fifteenth century, but was gradually monopolised by Dutch adventurers, before who



PACK ICE OFF THE NORTH COAST OF ICELAND.

the prey retreated till Spitzbergen's lonely shores became alive with boats and men. During the Napoleonic wars the trade passed into British hands. Step by step the whales retreated, or were exterminated, until the Greenland coast became the rendezvous, and Baffin's Bay the hunting ground. Now even this is failing, the noble animals which yet remain have sought a refuge behind the barriers of pack and iceberg, and in the autumn of 1892, the last of the Dundee whalers returned from her summer chase 'clean'—not a single capture to report. These failures have led to an expedition into Antarctic waters, the result of which will decide the course of future voyages. Meanwhile the attention of the northern fishermen had been directed to other whales of the 'Finner' type. These were neglected by the ordinary ship, not only because they gave less oil and a somewhat poorer quality of whalebone, but because their greater strength and agility

made them dangerous to the boats in which they were approached. Moreover, unlike the 'right' whale, they sank when dead, and when necessity forced the northerners to seek them, many a bold harpooner risked his life, and reached his prey, only to lose it after all. At last the problem met solution at the hands of the late Sweyn Foyn, a Norwegian whaler, and it is the method he employed which is put in practice here.

The chase is carried on by little steamers, armed with a harpoon-gun. A sailor sits aloft in a tub at the mast-head, known as the crow's-nest. When a whale is sighted he signals to the deck, and stealthily, and almost silently, for her machinery is specially designed with that intention, the boat approaches. Meanwhile the gun is brought to bear. The harpoon consists of a rod of iron fitting within the barrel; folding along it are two sharp blades, in front is a shell, and to an eye is fixed a ring which carries a strong cable. The discharge takes place, says Pouchet, at fifty feet, the shell, the bar, and all disappear in the flesh. The moment the wounded whale betakes itself to flight, the strain on the blades expands them till they form a kind of powerful grapnel, and in expanding they in turn explode the shell in front, which, bursting, kills the animal at once. Immediately the capstan hauls the cable tight, and with the whale securely fixed to port the steamer hurries homeward. The carcase is run up the beach at high water as far as possible, and the hunters go to sea again.

As we landed on a little wooden pier, some men were cutting off the blubber, while others with windlasses were dragging the lumps from the bloodstained waters where they fell. To the left was a large wooden building containing the tanks in which the fat was being melted to extract the oil, and beyond, some boys were cleaning sheets of the cartilaginous mass, commonly known as whalebone. These are really sieve-like plates, ending in a brush-like fringe, fixed within the mouth on either side. Piles of the true white 'bone' were lying on the beach; and floating in the water were hideous lumps of viscera and flesh. It is proposed to make use of these in the manufacture of manure and animal black.

Hence, I had planned a walk across the mountains to Ísafjörthr, the third of the 'towns' of Iceland. Leaving shortly after five P.M. I followed the hummocky track by the water's edge for three miles, and then turned into the Breithadalsheithi. The haycocks in the tuns of the wayside farmlets were sheltered by canvas covers, and the ricks by bands of turf, held down by wooden bars, themselves secured by ropes weighted by heavy stones. At the last of these I had a draught of milk, and the farmer, like a regular Icelander, despatched his son to fetch a horse, whereby to cross the stream. Seeing me safely mounted, he seized the pony's mane and plunging into the water himself, pulled us both across, nor would he return until he left me safe on the proper track.

The pass exceeds 1800 feet in height, and near the top occurs another

of the curious saucer-like depressions as common on these heithis as the triple peaks upon the mountains. The snow was pretty deep in places, and above the cirque itself lay a wilderness of scattered stone blocks, a chaotic scree, wherein the track was speedily lost, and in the usual fitness of such things, a heavy fog descended and obliterated every vestige of a landmark. Fortunately the compass acted fairly well, and, guided by it, I reached the path again. From end to end the pass is about seven miles in length, and at half-past ten a light appeared in the valley. Stumbling over the usual mounds of the hayfield, I knocked at the farmhouse door, but quite in vain. In half-an-hour another appeared, through what by this time was fairly the gloom of night. But the place was bewitched like the other, and no one came. Yet a light continued to shine in the Bathstofa, and, easily climbing the little wall, I tapped at the window, only to find that the light most promptly disappeared, and with it those hopes of supper which will-o'-the-wisp like it had kindled. Forsaking the farms, I tried the fishermen's cottages with uniform non-success, and tramped a two-miles trudge by the side of Skutilsfjörthr, wondering what in the world was 'up,' and trying to steal a boat, which only its weight prevented, for over the inky wavelets there danced the flickering gleam of a fishing-boat's mast-head light. At last, in orthodox style, a big white ghost loomed out of the darkness, fifty feet high at least, which presently turned itself into a most unedible church, fixed on a sandbank spit a few hundred feet in width. Attracted by a ruddy glow to a cottage near its walls, I peered through the window, and beheld a rudely-constructed hearth, a huge black caldron under a blacker chimney breast, and, amid the curls of the lurid smoke, the forms of a pair of ancient dames, who were bending over the pregnant pot. Startled beyond measure, they faced around as I gave a tentative tap; one opened the door an inch or so, heard a benighted wanderer's story in broken Icelandic, and mournfully shaking a dubious head, decidedly shut the door.



AN ICELANDIC HAYFIELD.

In utter amazement, I followed the sandspit which curved away up the fjord, and faring no better elsewhere, discovered at last, about two A.M., the Hotel Isafjord. A knock proving as fruitless as ever, I considered that

here, at any rate, right of admission existed, and therefore, procuring a flat-faced stone from the beach, and arranging a box in an angle, for a resting-place when needed, I laid deliberate siege to the wooden doors of the wooden hostelry. In alternate batter and rest an hour was spent, till the innkeeper's patience failed at last, and a window overhead opened at three A.M. The story was told again, the window closed like the cottage door, with a grunt or two from the owner. After giving him time to descend, which he failed entirely to do, I returned to the charge, and after a rousing cannonade, stood under the window and threatened him then and there with the Hreppstjóri's best attentions. This ended the struggle, and surrendering at discretion he opened the door; but nothing induced him to furnish a morsel of food. At seven A.M. the Thyra appeared, and great was the sympathetic wrath on board. The first boat ashore explained the mysterious state of affairs. A crew of drunken foreigners had been expelled a few hours before my arrival, and the sleepy folks could only imagine that one of these had returned! Isafjord soon made up for it. Perhaps the comfort of its bright interiors was heightened by contrast with these recent incidents. At the Sysselman's, where they produced some beautiful ancestral ornaments, and at the doctor's, windows full of begonias and pelargoniums, pianos, pictures, knick-knacks of all kinds banish the thought of icy seas, and show how the ocean links the civilisations of to-day.



AN ICELAND DOG.

The town is certainly progressive. With a population of about 600, it supports a newspaper, a library, and several schools. A photographer's establishment, a telephone line from a merchant's home to his store at the Eyri end, and a tiny tramway leading to a little pier, give the place quite a business-like appearance. It lives on its fisheries, whale and shark and cod, the latter finding a market in Barcelona. The houses are arranged in one or two long streets, with several cross roads, and many are surrounded by little wooden fences, such rarities in Iceland. The doctor, it seems, has a special antipathy to the native dogs, on account of the share they take in the propagation of a worm, proceeding from the sheep to mankind through

the cows' milk; but the blame lies greatly in the want of cleanliness that makes transmission possible. These animals were pets in England once. 'Use and custome,' says Fleming in 1576, 'hath intertained other dogges of an outlandishe kinde but a few, and the same beying of a pretty bygnesse; I meane Iseland dogges, curled and rough all over;' and Shakespeare gives the animal a cut in 'Pish for thee, Iceland dog! thou prick-eared cur of Iceland.'



Cod Washing and Drying.

The inlet opens into the grand gulf of Ísafjarthardjúp, the Deep of the Icefirth, wherein lie two islands, Vigr and Æthey, devoted to eider ducks. On the shores they are so crowded that Mr. Shepherd says, 'It was with difficulty that we avoided treading on some of the nests.' Walls have been built in some places with every alternate stone left out, so as to provide a series of square compartments for nesting. Further up are the scenes of

Hávarthar Saga, and half way along the northern shore the range of cliffs is broken by the only inlet on that side, the Kaldalón, which runs right under the Dranga Jökull, whence a mighty ice-fall precipitates itself almost into the waters of the fjord. A mile or two eastward is Skjáldfannardal, by which Mr. Shepherd ascended the Dranga. He describes the upper portion of the valley as a wild ravine, in the centre of which the river descends in a series of fearful rapids and falls, while on either side (in June) great walls of snow tower up, two or three hundred feet in height, and even the glacier face itself 'was almost perpendicular, and some hundred feet in depth.' The summit of the jökull resembles a 'round barrel of snow, and any cairn raised on its back might be called the top.'

The sail down the 'Deep' is glorious. One great headland after another comes in sight, passes, and falls astern, with long vistas up the fjords between until the end is reached in the grand terraced mass of Stigahlith, famous for its surturbrand deposits. The sunset glows on these northern heights are well described by Mr. Shepherd: 'Stigahlith's broad flank was a gorgeous red, while a patch or two of snow on his highest ridge were of the most lovely pink imaginable. A little way up the fjord there stood a mountain whose purple sides seemed to be veiled in pink gauze; and further up still, deep purple mountains gradually faded into ebony, while above them all floated clouds of gorgeous colours—orange and yellow. In a little while Stigahlith retired into gloom, and his neighbour was crowned with glory. Thus, the scene kept changing, and the beautiful colours flitted from mountain to mountain, losing none of their brightness, yet rendering the sight more charming by the constant change.'

A few hours later we round Horn, the Cap Nord of the peninsula, but not of the island; that stands 150 miles to the east: about the same distance separates us now from the Greenland coast. We look out for pack ice, but none appears. Plenty, however, comes down in what we call the spring months. The little bays which take the place of fjords here often contain a solitary farm,—what a lonely life! The Arctic Ocean in front, a lofty mountain behind, stretching forth two great wings, which, bathing their feet in the waters, close round the basin-like valley and shut out the rest of the world.

Next morning we enter the Húnaflói, or the Young Bear's Bay, so named from the polar bears that come ashore on the ice-floes. Their fate is speedily sealed, for the peasants attack them with club or scythe-blade. There are two or three *reykir* in the lowlands, but none of great moment, yet the played-out beds serve to vary the landscape with their sulphury tints. To our right the peninsula is pierced by the winding Steingrímsfjörthr, from the shores of which a dizzy land-track leads to the head of Isafjörthr. All the crossings from inlet to inlet are fine wild mountain tracks, goat-paths if you will, but safe enough for the cat-like Iceland ponies.



THE DETTIFOSS.



A Fjord on the North Coast of Iceland.

CHAPTER X.

The Shores of the Arctic Sea.

FAR up the Hrutafjörthr is Melar, the first habitation reached by the traveller from the west. Let him, however, beware of staying there. Even Miss Oswald, whose work *By Fell and Fjord* is the lady's book on Iceland, in spite of the spelling of its place names, admits that 'the farmer has not fairly grasped the traveller's side of the innkeeper's trade.' Fortunately, there are other farms below, and ten miles down the firth are the trading stations of Bortheyri on the west, and an inn at Thoroddstathr on the east, near the steaming springs of another reykir. The eastern path lies high up on the hillside, commanding lovely views of the almost land-locked inlet. That on the west keeps to the seashore, where it can, leading at times through shallow pools with heavy fringes of seaweed, which the ponies will want to eat. By the water's edge are shell-beds, by no means common on this generally rock-bound coast. On the sandy levels delicate yellow poppies grow; and when headlands bar the way, and the track must

be the spring of greater enterprise, for this is a spur more common in the north. High up behind them are the rocky barriers of the dal, on the blackened sides of which the mountain streams weave lace-like, foamy patterns, as they do on the beetling crags of Norway. The mouth of the valley was the scene of one of the earliest attempts to spread a knowledge of the Christian faith, but the likeness of Thorvaldr's methods to those tried later in the south was hardly calculated to set forth the truth successfully.

Northward the outlines of the mountains soften, and rounded grassy forms occupy the long peninsula, on the western shore of which lies Skagastrand. From these, however, rises nobly the peak of Spákonvfell—the Spæ-wife's-hill—where the prophetess Thordis dwelt, about the year 1000, making that lonely peak the throne of her oracle. The coast is most exposed, and a nasty reef would make it a dangerous spot in a nor'-west gale. Rounding the point, we enter the splendid Skagafjörthr. The aisles of its vaulted sides sweep up in stately curves from the deep blue liquid floor to the cloudy arch above, save where pillars and buttresses break the line, standing boldly out with a monumental gracefulness. On our left is the curious headland of Thórtharhöfthi, rising, Gibraltar-like, from the ocean, but with shoulders that rapidly sink into widely diverging sandbanks, linking it on to the real coast, and enclosing between them a wide but hidden lagoon. On the right is the pinnacled ridge of Tindastóll, with the famous agate cove of Glerhaltavík, where onyxes, zeolites, carnelians, chalcedonies, and crystals of all kinds are said to abound. Yet another reykir lies under its northern extremity, close to a farm of similar name.

But even more interesting still is the fortress-like island of Drangey, whose precipitous rock walls rise sheer from the water's edge to the height of 600 feet. It has but a single landing-place, and that but a foothold at the head of a submerged scree. Yet the table-like top is fertile, and sheep are ferried across and hoisted up for the summer; but the wealth of the island lies in the circling hosts of its feathered tribes. The cliffs are alive with guillemots, and black-capped puffins, lovely but screeching terns, gulls, and marauding skuas. The first are most numerous, and though fowlers used to be hung over the cliffs by ropes in the Faröe way, and are still sent down when eggs are in question, the method is hardly one to commend itself to the average Icelander of to-day. He prefers the simpler and safer fleke, which he makes by procuring a board, and drilling a number of holes, over a hundred, Metcalfe says, and fastening round each a horsehair snare. Towards the end of May hundreds of men repair to the island in boats, towing these flekes in scores behind them. On arriving they fasten a bird on each as decoy, anchor the whole by a rope and stone, and themselves proceed to a fishing-ground. On their return, the board is sometimes found to be covered with victims.

By the side of the island a lofty rock soars, like an obelisk, up to the

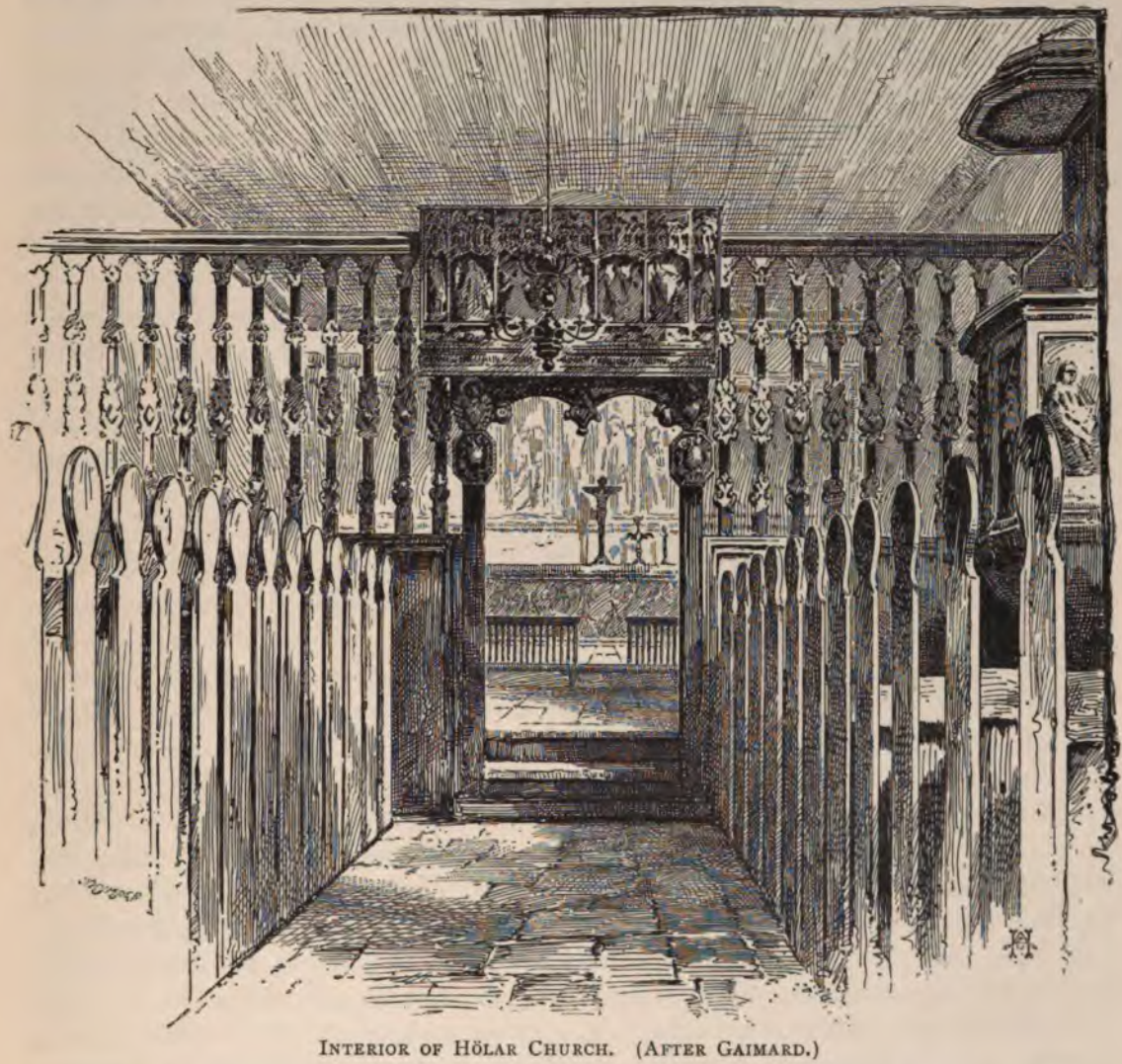
height of 500 feet. The Icelanders like to compare it to a ship in full sail, and tell you that once a troll and his wife had stolen a cow, and were crossing the firth when the sun rose. Of course they were petrified then and there, and so was the cow, though why she should have suffered, not being a troll, is not quite clear. The cow is the island, the troll has succumbed, and the spire is his wife. But Drangey has memories more real than these. Here dwelt and here died the outlaw whose birthplace we saw on the Midfirth. Here Grettir the Strong retired with his brother Illugi. Time after time his enemies tried to entrap him, in vain, till the thrall who was guarding the rope ladder slept, and a boatload of braves ascended, to find that the man they were seeking was dying. His axe had slipped from the edge of a drift-log, and the wound he received had taken bad ways. So they pulled off the roof, when they found that the sword of Illugi was strong enough guard for the doorway, and slew their enfeebled foe.

Steaming right up to the head of the fjord, we anchor opposite Sauthárkrokr. An inn, some stores and warehouses, with a sprinkling of smaller buildings, some of them brightly coloured, give the place quite a settlement air, but the background is dreadfully bare, a shingle embankment sixty feet high—plainly an ancient sea beach. A gully or two have been scored in its regular face, serving but to make it look more like a rubbish heap. Yet, when examined more closely, beauties appear even there, for it is just a collection of minerals, broken, and frayed, and worn, but preserving the striking tints of the purple basalts, and the green or crimson, and cream-coloured contents of the Tindastóll inter-beds, washed up by the swirl of the sea, and mingled in picturesque confusion with ochreous lava fragments and crumbling ruddy or yellow palagonite, rolled hither in flood time by the Hérathsvötn.

The valley, through which the various streams of this mighty river flow, is one of the most thickly-peopled in the island. For five-and-thirty miles inland, farms are found along its banks and those of its tributaries, from which horses and sheep come down to the coast in droves of hundreds. In a side valley, to the east, is Hólar, once the seat of the northern Romanist bishopric, whose avaricious holders added farm to farm, and mile to mile, till, by some means or other, hundreds of these were theirs. They seem to have had, wherever they went, remarkable skill in scenting the fairest, most fruitful lands, and ability equally wonderful in securing the cream for themselves. The present church, though a source of pride to the Icelanders, because made of stone, is only an eighteenth century building, yet it contains the so-called 'altar' of the older church, a gaudy and elaborate altarpiece, and a number of sensationally-coloured trappings. Portraits and tombs of bishops, Roman and Reformed, abound, and as a relic of antiquity the spot remains unequalled in the north.

English fishermen make their way at times into the fjord, and rough

and ready though they be, there is a kind of international friendship which their pranks have not upset. Perhaps its origin dates back to times when forays and settlements created ties between the lands which yet remian. Metcalfe tells of two Icelanders whose relationship to Queen Victoria could be traced. In modern times the work of Henderson has left a fragrant



INTERIOR OF HÖLAR CHURCH. (AFTER GAIMARD.)

memory. Faulty though the translation of the Bible which he took may have been, there are learned Icelanders who think that the faults have been exaggerated, and however this may seem, the gratitude they still express I find is deep and real. Does it not show that, despite the flaws in the nation's heart, it vibrates still to the touch of a truly loving hand, and that it knows right well the value of the noblest gift in which love can express itself?

It was a grand sail round to Siglufjörthr. Out to the north the dancing waves; on our right a succession of peaks and ravines, alike, yet so different; and when, in the twilight, we swung round the last great headland, the peaceful fjord lay resting before us, a culmination of the beauty. From its still and silent waters, over the rich green sloping pastures that clung to the mountain sides, up to the ledges above, every one outlined with fresh white snow our glances might wander at will. Patches of old snow, covered with pure unsullied sheets of recent fall, gave birth to waterfalls almost as white as themselves, which gracefully leapt from ledge to ledge, till they lost themselves down in the meadows. Some fishing-boats lay at anchor, others were drawn up ashore, and from the farms and cots light wreaths of peat smoke curled gently up, where the evening meal was being prepared. Nestling under the crags on our right were the stores and homes of a merchant or two, clustering round the little church.

Well could one stay in the Sail-firth awhile. There are farms in the clefts of the coastline without, each in its lonely valley, reached only by water or over a breakneck mountain track; but in May and June there is grand shark-fishing, and a month later herrings appear in shoals—so men put up with isolation, and the women apparently are not considered. Perhaps they are supposed to be too busy for loneliness.

Early next day we leave for Eyjafjörthr, the long-drawn island firth, at the head of which stands Akureyri, the metropolis of the north. At first the mountains come close to the water's edge, especially on the east. Room alone remains for a narrow path, but at intervals beds of débris from the picturesque crags behind have formed a wider base, and wherever room for a tun exists a farm has been wedged in. The contrasts between the rich brown rock and the bright green turf are very beautiful, and even more striking still are the lines of velvety moss that mark where tiny runlets are coursing down the precipice. Passing under Hrísey, the Frost-isle, which gives its name to the firth, the mountains recede and farms are multiplied. On the right is the dal of the Hörgá, near whose mouth stands Möthruvellir, at first the home of Guthmundr the Mighty, hero of the Ljösvetninga Saga; and then the site of a monastery founded in 1295, a most unfortunate spot, for the home of the monks was burnt, rebuilt, forsaken, replaced by a stone-built mansion for the Amtmathr, or governor, known as Frithriksgjöf, in honour of a visit from the Crown Prince of Denmark, which in its turn was twice destroyed by fire. The Amtman lives at Akureyri now.

But Möthruvellir has more recent distinction, for the government has here established a college, whose curriculum closely resembles that of the modern side of an English public school, consisting as it does mainly of science subjects, mathematics, and modern languages. It accommodates sixty or seventy students, and the demand for room exceeds the supply. At its head is Dr. Hjaltalin, so long in the Advocates' Library at Edinburgh.

A few miles higher up is another chained down church, that of Glæsibær, and just beyond it projects Oddeyri, a spit of sand like those which protect the north-western fjords. The large building in its centre is one of the stores of the Icelandic Trading Company, round which cluster a group of houses, forming the first division of Akureyri. The second straggles along the beach, and the third lies further still by the side of the modern church. Two days are to be spent here, for a heavy cargo is expected, in preparation for which the Farōe men are busily shifting the coal from the aft tank, while the pumps eject 150 tons of water from the centre.

The town consists of lines of tarred or painted stores and houses, among which the apothecary's many-windowed residence takes a prominent position. Behind lies a row of débris-mounds, which fringe a swampy turf-producing plateau, and higher still the lofty ridge of Súlur, or the Pillars. We have hardly landed when we are called to coffee with one of our fellow-passengers. Her husband has charge of the Government Lands in the northern Amt. The cosy room and handsome well-stocked bookcases make one wish to linger, and presently our hosts produce a pile of photographs, three of them representing Helgi the Lean, who colonised the neighbourhood in 890, Thorun his wife, and his daughters, Hlíf and Thora, characters assumed at a grand millennial celebration in 1890, whose robes, dresses, and accessories, reproduced at a cost of 1500 kroners from the details which the sagas give, recall most vividly the Vikings' picturesque adornment. Odes and songs were sung by modern skalds, and nothing left undone to realise the ancient chieftain, not even provision of the Wassail bowl. From the materials thus presented the pictures given in Chapter I. were drawn.



A Mountain Ash at Akureyri.

Resuming our walk through the town, we soon perceive the famous trees, some mountain ashes, twenty to thirty feet in height. One or two stand in the Lieutenant-Governor's garden. The trees and grass-plot, with its little fence, give the place quite an English look. A wood existed formerly some distance lower down the fjord, but one winter, cold beyond

measure killed it. Even as late as 1887, the Greenland ice remained in the firth until the middle of September. The main difficulty of the Icelander lies in these exceptional occurrences. For years the winters will present ordinary alternations of frost and thaw. In spring the ice-floes come, and a few weeks later go, but from time to time these special seasons come, unheralded by signs which might make more perfect preparation possible, and then the flocks are decimated, and famine threatens. There are about nine hundred inhabitants in this progressive settlement, and artizans of most kinds may be found if looked for, but the absence of signs is somewhat troublesome. Yet it has its compensations, for the place has a homelier air in consequence. A library and a newspaper have been in existence for some time.

Next morning I set off in search of the Home of the Winds glacier, marked on the map as being within easy reach. Climbing the shingle-heaps behind the town, crossing the plateau, where many little stacks of peat were drying, and coasting round the northern spur of Súlur, I found myself in the wild and lonely Glerá Valley, up which I walked for hours, but the only sign of the glacier was the glint of a snowdrift far away above the cliffs on the opposite side. Finding it quite impossible to reach it in reasonable time, I descended the valley by using the sheep-tracks, the only signs of life in its tumbled desolation, save the presence of a single pony and the fleecy makers of the welcome though narrow paths. Near the foot is a splendid gorge, where the stream emerges from a shattered cañon-like reach through a lofty portal, where the rock has been rent in twain for a hundred feet in depth. A mile or two lower down is the Fall of the Glerá, where the river leaps into a small ravine.

A delightful excursion from Akureyri is that into the Fnjóská valley, which lies parallel with the fjord, and just behind the Vathlaheithi, the long ridge seen across the water. It is a pretty glen, with coppices of fragrant birch, not forty feet in height, as formerly, but none the less acceptable where woodlands are so rare. Down the centre flow the bright clear waters of the sparkling river. In winter-time the scene is changed. Says Mr. Lock: 'The touchwood water looked like a broad line of angular blocks of white marble thrown together in the utmost confusion and dusted over with snow powder. This showed that the rebellious stream had broken up and refrozen since my last journey.' The path reaches the river near the parsonage of Háls, whose praises have been sung by many a traveller, and stretching onwards past the bird-haunted Ljósavatn, leads to a famous waterfall, the Gothafoss, or God's Force, where the Skjálfandafljót pours over a deep black basalt ridge into a gorge a hundred yards in width and some fifty feet in depth. The fall is semicircular in shape, and in the centre is divided by a rocky islet. To the right the stream descends in one main sheet, while the portion on the left is further split into a series of falls

among some rocks, which the swirling shingle-laden waves have hollowed, undermined, and tunnelled into forms of wild grotesqueness.

Further still is Mývatn and its wonders, of which more anon.

On Sunday we dropped gently down the placid Eyjafjörthr, stopping two or three times to pick up cargo from heavy boats, with breadth of beam that gave them huge capacity for the bulky loads of wool and fish they brought alongside. Evening found us in the *Shivering* bay, with the peaks on the western shores lit up by the glow of the setting sun. The atmosphere itself was filled with a rich green radiance, reflected from the liquid depths of the sapphire sky, which, lake-like, laved as it were the shores of the crimsoned island clouds that floated on its bosom. The mountain crests shone out like torches against the indigo slopes of the far-receding vales, and right through the centre of all gleamed the golden lane that led through the troubled waves, straight to the source of all the glory; and the waves themselves that tumbled and tossed elsewhere in their own unrest, glittered and shone in that streaming flood as the path upon which the Lord lifts up the light of His countenance. But this sun, like all earthly fires, sank deeper and deeper, till the flame of the waves was quenched. Three months earlier, it would not have died entirely, for at midsummer Burton has said: 'As time neared the noon of night, the burnished circle, utterly shorn of its beams, seemed almost to stand still: when suspended about a diameter and a half above the ocean, it changed to a long oval, to a mushroom with distinct columella, to half-a-sovereign, and finally to a fragment of golden egg, which seemed to indent the blue horizon.'

An hour later we anchored off Húsavík, the house-bay of Garthar Svavarson, where a few lights twinkled through the gloom, from the trading-station, which here lies on a shelf, some distance above high water. It is the starting-point for Mývatn, and for the Dettifoss, the Tumbling Force, the grandest fall in Iceland, and probably, for height and size combined, the finest too in Europe.

Eastward from Húsavík lies a tract of peat-bog, and then a stony desert, but in a few miles a very ancient lava bed is reached, so far disintegrated, says Mr. Lock, that a dwarf birch forest has sprung up and thriven, scenting the air deliciously, and forming the resort of innumerable red-winged thrushes, who chirped and fluttered through the low branches in all directions. At intervals are little cracks which intersect the lava; some of them six feet wide and thirty feet deep, still hiding drifts of last year's snow, and crossed by natural stone bridges, like miniature crevasses. They doubtless owe their origin to contraction of the cooling rock.

The first day's march ends at the farm of Ás, near the great Jökulsá i Axarfirthi, a kind of Icelandic Nile, which, draining the northern glaciers of the Vatna Jökull, unites its turbid feeders, and hurries off to the Axefirth,

some knobs of basalt project, and the wild rebound of the falling mass flings sheets of shattered foam into the awful sweep of the plunging flood, till the whole resembles a lamb's-wool fleece depending from the crag. And this is set in the jaws of the black abyss, where nothing detracts from the startling but truly Icelandic contrast. Yet, however fine in its summer guise, it must surpass itself when, in spring time, with a greater width by far, 'the mad career of huge blocks of ice hustling each other over the brink, must form an almost appallingly grand scene,' a continuous avalanche and a waterfall combined.

South of Húsavík is the wildest district in all Iceland. From the sulphur fields of Mývatn, themselves sufficiently weird, to the tumbling seas of ice which pour down the northern verge of the Vatna Jökull, stretches an ancient lava bed, one thousand square miles in extent, not inappropriately named the Ódáthahraun, the Lava of Evil Deed, though some believe that the name is due to the deeds of the Utilegumenn, or outlaws, with which superstition has peopled this savage waste. On its eastern edge is Askja, the seat of most recent volcanic action. If we include the Vatna itself, and the eastern desert, we shall find that Mývatn stands at the northern angle of a parallelogram, covering nearly six thousand square miles, without a single inhabitant, and even uncrossed by a beaten track.

It is a most remarkable fact that the three great sulphur-producing regions lie in a perfectly straight line across the country from Krísuvík, in the south-west, to Mývatn in the north-east, and that the third, Kerlíngafjöll, is exactly midway between the two extremes. Owing to its inaccessibility, the latter has been almost entirely ignored, but Professor Thóroddsson, who has recently visited it, declares it to be worthy to rank with either of the others. When it is further noted that all the important series of hot springs (with the single exception of Reykholt) lie either exactly upon the same line as Hengill and Laugardalr, or close to it, as Reykir and the Geysir system, it becomes very evident that, however much local action has to do with the nature of the changes taking place in the soil, and consequent effects produced, it is, at all events, most probable that the primary causes of these decompositions are not without connection. It is interesting also to observe that a strictly proportional distance divides the vents upon the line. From Krísuvík to Hengill, 23 miles, to Laugardalr 23, to Kerlíngafjöll 46, to Mývatn 92; or 184 in all. A prolongation south-westward for twenty miles brings one to Reykjanes, just as a similar extension to the north leads to the pits at Krafla, and the outliers of the Fuglasker answer to the jets of Uxahver. Lastly, while the main line follows the same direction as the valley of the Thjórsá, its northern curve corresponds to that of the Jökulsá í Axarfirthi and Eyjafjörthr with its river.

The road from Húsavík strikes south, over broken heathland, where Iceland moss is gathered in early summer, and crowberries, blueberries,

and whortleberries, in autumn. The latter grow everywhere, and an Icelandic dinner is often followed by a dessert, in which they are served in a dish of milk, or *skyr*, with sugar; and this, with the pancakes, coffee, and kleinur, serves to redeem Icelandic cookery.

The first springs reached are those of Uxahver, so named from a wondrous story of an ox boiled alive therein! The largest no longer provides eruptions, like those which Henderson saw; the earthquake of 1872 put a stop to them, yet the temperature remains exceedingly high. Spirtings and bubblings go on incessantly, and columns of steam blow off through the seething pools—from which streams of scalding water continually escape—while on the hillside above are the sulphur beds of Theistareykir, an



AN ICELANDIC COUNTRY CHURCH.

earnest of more to follow. Crossing a sandy desert, the track soon strikes more recent lava, especially the famous streams of 1724–1730, which, pouring from Krafla and Leirnukr, destroyed the parsonage of Reykjahlíth, and threatened the church as well, but, dividing, spared it. The largest of these was nine miles long and three wide. Metcalfe relates the experience of an eye-witness who 'states that in his day a blue sulphureous flame hung over the stream. At night it was all of a red glow, dyeing the heavens the same colour. At times the torrent relaxed; when its surface became covered with a solidified rind some two feet in thickness. Anon, the fiery tide flowed again, and pressing on the hardening mass, split the epidermis, just as I have seen the water-flood burst the ice encasing the bosom of the mighty Danube; and the masses of stone were swept along by it, just like the lumps of disrupted ice on the water.'

The successor of the church just mentioned, for Icelandic churches, as a rule, are not very long-lived, stands at the north-eastern corner of the vatn, or lake, from which the place is named. The other half of the word is the native designation of the Midges, for which the lake is infamous. However much travellers may disagree in their opinion of the water, from the 'beautiful lake' of one to the 'ugly puddle' of cynical Burton, there is absolute harmony as to the insect pests, which they all anathematise as heartily as they do the farmer's rapacity at Reykjahlíth.

Except for Krafla it would seem that the southern end of the lake is preferable. Good quarters at Skútustathir enable one to enjoy its picturesqueness. It is said to be forty miles round, and is second in size alone to Thíngvallavatn, of which the circumference is stated at thirty, but Mývatn is so cut up by lava streams, old and new, so studded without islets and projecting reefs, that, as Burton says, 'you might as well measure round a spider.' The islets are green with angelica, and are dotted with ducks, whose eggs are too ruthlessly gathered. The waters abound with trout and char. Away on the east and south are the sulphur mountains, beginning with Hlítharfjall (Ledge fell), masking Krafla; dipping to form the Námaskarth, or Pit's Pass, rising again to the ridge of Námafjall, so named from the central series of solfataras; and after a longer interval rising again to the south in the deep blue cone of Bláfjall, which hides the Fremrinámar, or Further Pits. The sides of the northern ridges are blotched with red and yellow patches, abruptly ended where the lava streams have cut across them, while above and between are lovely green spots, untouched as yet by sulphurous fume or molten flood. Like some of the desolate regions we have already seen, they recall the slag and cinder-heaps and mounds of chemical waste that disfigure the 'Black Country' of South Staffordshire, and the columns of steam and smoke that rise from those burning heaps are reproduced here, on a vaster scale.

Speaking generally, the sulphur fields present themselves in three aspects, first, as 'live' mines, or solfataras, in which a constant deposition of the mineral is going on in the loose earth, from the gases continually passing upwards; secondly, as 'beds,' due to the condensation on the surface, of the drifting sulphur fumes; and thirdly, as dry or 'dead' pits, in which the action has ceased. It is the latter which provide the brightest colouring of the landscape, and from which most of the mineral already exported has been derived. But these are continually changing; live pits spirt, bubble, simmer, and die; while dead ones which have had the upper crust removed take a new lease of life, unless the flow of gas has found a new vent for itself elsewhere. From the experience of Mr. Shepherd, and the observation of the farmers, it is evident that a single year is sufficient to produce a decided alteration in the relative position of the springs and caldrons. Hence, the Icelanders have been able for centuries to continue

the collection of variable quantities from the self-same mines. They have damaged the outlets in many cases, by trampling down the loose earth, or carelessly mixing the dirt and the sulphur, while no attempt appears to have been made to intercept the large amount passing off in fume, by erecting funnels, or tubes, in which it might be arrested. An effort was made by an English company, in 1876, to deal with the product on a larger basis; but, like earlier endeavours in the same direction, it came to grief: apparently home management was not unconcerned in the result.

The most northerly of the three 'fields,' that ending at Krafla (pronounced Krabla), is the largest, covering as it does nearly three square miles. Uniting the accounts of Metcalfe and Burton, we learn that a two-mile ride from Reykjahlíth leads to a sandy plain, covered with numerous gamboge-coloured pustules, which when removed reveal specimens of pure, or native sulphur. Crossing the plain, the track approaches the primrose and blue, and black, and white, and green, and red slopes of the hills through which it proceeds by the Námaskarth. 'On reaching the summit, Henderson's dozen mud-caldrons appear in sight beneath, reduced by half at present, but gruesome enough as it is. We descend on foot, over the leprous crust that cakes the flat. A cry from the cavern-mouthed boy is too late to stop me, and in goes my foot through the crust, disclosing a festering hole. We approach, with cautious tread, half-blinded by steam, and suffocated by sublimated sulphur, the closely-packed caldrons all boiling with a thick lead-coloured mixture. One has surrounded itself with a blue round slimy breast-work, disgusting to look upon. In another the pasty soup is so thick and slab, that its attempt to boil is a signal failure, degenerating into a sluggish simmer.'

Rejoining the ponies, we ride northward, with lava on one side, and a chain of mountains on the other, whose sides are feathered with willow and birch, alchemilla and wild geranium. Presently Krafla appears, but its great mud-caldron has become a tawny funnel of clay and bolus, the degradation of trachyte and palagonite, eight hundred yards across, whose depths are filled with water, greenish-blue in tint, while beyond are more of the bubbling and spluttering pools, which have taken its energy. On the east is the curious Hrafntinnuhryggr, the Raven-flint ridge, or Obsidian mountain, a pile of black volcanic glass.

The features are reproduced on the Námafjall itself to the east, where crystals of alum and lime occur as variants. The ledges reminded Metcalfe of the cliffs of Alum Bay in the Isle of Wight, but he thought that they would give but a very washed-out idea of the brilliant tints of these ruddy slopes, from the clefts in which the vapour escapes with a constant fizzing screech. The track to the southernmost pits leads round the western base of Bláfjall to the Great Kettle, which Burton describes as an oval, 600 yards by 350. 'The outer wall, raised 150 to 120 feet, is one mass of soft sulphur,

covered by black sand; every footstep gives vent to a curl of smoke, and we do not attempt to count the hissing fumeroles, which are of every size, from the thickness of a knitting-needle upwards. With the least pressure a walking-stick sinks two feet.'

The difficulty in making the most of these mines is the distance from a port, and the absence of fuel for distilling on the spot. If the latter were present, and only the product, refined and pure, remained to be carried down, it might be done, but the transportation of masses, crude and mingled with clay and sand, on ponies' backs for thirty-five miles from the central, or fifty from the southern fields, increases the cost to such an extent, that it cannot compete with the product of the Sicilian mines; besides which it is very doubtful whether the quantity is sufficient to justify roads or tramways. Far to the east, reaching indeed to the coast, are undulating stretches of heath, with lava streams at intervals, or wastes of stone and cinders. Here only, in Iceland, are Skis made use of to any extent in winter. Elsewhere the endless rivers, and boulder-strewn dals, prevent their employment, but over the eastern plains progress is rapid and pleasant, when a fall of snow has laid down a crystal floor. A pair I procured are made of ash, 6 feet 7 inches long, and 4 inches wide in front, diminishing to $3\frac{1}{4}$ at the rear, while the thickness increases in the same direction from $\frac{1}{2}$ an inch to $\frac{3}{4}$. They are turned up 5 inches at the front, where a hole is bored, through which a cord is threaded. The Icelanders balance the Ski on their fingers, to discover the centre of gravity, just in front of which they drive a staple on either side. Through these a strap is passed, which tightens over the foot. A crosspiece of wood or leather is fixed behind, as a kind of heel-stop, to keep the foot from slipping back, while the cord prevents the Ski from running forward when the foot is withdrawn.



ICELANDIC FUEL, SHEEP'S DUNG.

From the homesteads south of Mývatn, the remarkable crater valley of Askja may be attained by following the northern fringe of the Lava of Evil Deed.

In January 1875, a violent eruption took place; in February, Jón of Vithikær, a much more than usually enterprising farmer, made his way to the edge of what he found to be an enormous crater valley. The pass by which he entered is known as Jón's Skarth. In June, Mr. Watts examined it, but the suffocating fumes that filled the huge depression hid much of what it held, while the dangerous nature of the edge made close approach most hazardous. In 1881 Mr. Morgan visited the place, and found a valley 4½ miles by two or three, bounded by a rampart 500 feet in depth. Within it lay a lake, from which he saw a column of mingled steam and water rise to the height of 200 feet, while steam was issuing from cracks and fissures in the floor, and gaseous emanations were coating the rocks around their vents with deposits, yellow, green, and pinky-white. In 1891, Mr. Seymour Thompson was on the spot, but found no energetic action. The lake was sleeping in its bed, and only a few curling wreaths of steam remained, as evidences of the dormant power. The edges of the rum consist in many places of slopes of treacherous ash or cinder, as easy to descend, as difficult to surmount. Where these surround the lake, a single step upon the shifting surface may send the venturer and his foothold to the bottom, at once of crater and of lake; while if he escapes the latter, the climb may easily resolve itself into one step up, and a couple down.

Along the valley west of Mývatn runs the track which crosses the central desert of the island. Its gruesome name, the Sprengisandr, or Bursting Sand, comes from the old Icelandic dread that a horse might be ridden till he dropped, in the hurried race from oasis to oasis. Several of the northern bridle-paths converge upon Íshóll, the starting-point for the South. One of these leads up the valley of the Skjálfandafljót, past Stóruvellir, where a picturesque old gabled house has been replaced by a square stone box, the horror of whose rectangularity of plan, and wall, and window, is intensified by its low-pitched roof, as destitute of eaves as the house itself of anything to break its staring squareness. That such a sturdy building should arise of course is excellent, from a sanitary point of view, but let young Iceland learn to keep as much as possible of the quaint old form which had at least a beauty of its own. An overhanging roof, enough to redeem a shell from ugliness, may be dangerous in a wind-swept gully or upon an upland wild, but even there the walls are not obliged to rise in perfect bareness from the open hill-side.

Meadow-lands and pastures cease at Ishóll, and as we climb the valley leading to the desert we may spare a minute for a lingering look at the homestead of the 'Ice-hill,' for next door, to the southward, is more than one hundred and twenty miles away. Beyond its little bright green *tun*, lie the deep blue waters of a dark abysmal lake, said to be 1200 feet in depth, lapping the craggy bases of the ruddy hills which frown above it. As we advance sand-polished stones abound upon the barren upland, just as

in Arabian Deserts, sometimes arranged by frost, and thaw, and storm, into tesselated pavements, broken here and there by basalt outcrops, and once by a grassy oasis. A few hours' march leads to the desert brink, and a sharp descent of 500 feet brings the traveller to the lava edge by the 'Shivering Flood.' When swollen by the sudden thaws of early summer, the river here must reach a width of half-a-mile. Six hours from Íshóll, guides will stop at the entrance to Kithagil, a mountain gorge with some apology for vegetation. While tents are being pitched, we may go and see a curious natural arch, some fifty feet in height, with a span of eight. Over the evening meal we shall doubtless hear something of Thomsen's Riding Song, the strain of the wayfarers from the south. Miss Oswald gives a stanza of it.

'Ride we and ride we, dash across the wide sand;
Low sinks the sun, now west by Arnarfell,
Strange things uncanny out about the wild lands,
Haunt the desert ice-hills; ride we swift and well.
On with you, ponies, keeping up the speed,
Nothing evil overtakes the fast-running steed.'

Mr. Coles supplies a more metrical rendering by Mr. Magnusson, of which a portion runs—

'Ride we, ride we, drive we o'er the sand;
Twilight's sinking over Herthubreith,
Elfin-queen is bridling her wolf-steed,
Better not to be within her way.
I would give the best steed that I were
Already as far down in Kithagil.'

Plainly this refers to the next and most serious stage. Once the gorge is left, there can be no halt for fifty miles, save for a rest, or just once at a tiny patch of grass, enough for a bite, though not a meal. Slowly the cavalcade will climb the hill and make its way across the plain. Track there is none, save perhaps the hoofmarks of a previous party, yet even here the vast expanse of dark brown sand is not entirely destitute of life, for a tuft of moss, or a little saxifrage, will rear its head sometimes, and do its humble duty, even in this forsaken place. About midway a lake occurs almost on the crest of the wilderness, where a height of 2590 feet is reached. Towards evening the wide horizon narrows, and we enter the stone-waste between the Hofs Jökull and that of Túngnafell. So lofty is our vantage-ground, that the real height of the glacier mountains does not show to anything like the advantage of their southern rivals, whose spurs sweep up from the very waters of the ocean. Slowly the level sinks as the upper sources of the Thjórsá are approached, and now we must take our choice. To the right a range of heights, the Arnarfells, rising into three graceful peaks, supports and hides to some extent the Hofs Icefield, from which,

down every gil and dal, there pours a rapid torrent. Shall we take the one by one in detail, the sixty of them, risking the quicksands, and the ever-changing courses, or cross to the eastern bank of the main strean camp at the oasis of Eyvindarkofaver, where plenty of coarse grass abound and then recross the stream to-morrow, at a great ford where it shallow out, after having gathered all these tributaries to itself? The guide mu decide, for much will depend upon the weather, and the then condition the streams themselves. Both alternatives are chosen: perhaps, if anything the southerners prefer the eastern route, while their northern friends accep the streams, and camp beneath Arnarfell. To either spot will take twelv hours from Kithagil. 'On reaching the hill,' says Dr. Foster, 'we caugh sight of some swans and cygnets, and tired as we were, the instincts of th chase were too strong, so we rode up the hillside, as far as we could, an then dismounting, ran after the cygnets, and knocked over one or two wit our riding-whips, and made a meal of them later on.'

The next day's march will end at one of the streams from the Blu Peak Glacier, the Hof's most southerly outlier, just underneath the feet o which are the springs of the central sulphur vents. The fourth day will giv us basalt gorges on our right with waterfalls, and as we sink from seventee hundred feet or so above sea-level to a thousand, we shall encounter lav streams again, and pumice-beds, till we find ourselves entangled in a maz of little willow scrub, as Hekla heaves in sight. The first farm is found a Skrithufellsskógr, but Hagi, an hour lower down, offers better quarters Here we may join the western routes, or those which lead to Burn Njal's land.

But we have wandered far from Húsavík, where our steamer staye but an hour or two, and then with her bows turned northward for the las time, carried us beyond the Arctic Circle, past Rifstangi and back again, t toss 'mid the war of the sea waves, out in the Thistlefirth. And then ther rose before us its wonderful eastern horn, 'the upright wall of Lánganes, a flat-topped ridge, two leagues in length, and two hundred feet in height but scarce a mile across. Ruthless and cold are its towering sides, an more pitiless still they seemed when our captain told of an English shi which struck at the base. Her crew reached a narrow ledge before sh broke up, but there they stayed, for not even a sailor could scale that cliff and there they died, with the seagulls' scream for a requiem. As w rounded the point, far out, its southern face appeared, lashed by the swee of the waves, which angrily broke on a scree at its foot, and flun themselves half-way up to its crest. Yet, out at sea, there rode like bird on those waves the smacks of a Grimsby fishing-fleet, the earliest heralds o the homeland.

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